"Where there is no vision the people perish"

No. 2 1945 Vol. XXXVI

The POETRY REVIEW

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The Immortal Flame: Yesterday and Today

"Poetry redeems from decay the visitations of the divinity in man," wrote Shelley many years ago, in his eloquent *Defence of Poetry*. And thereby, in one short sentence, he embodied the essence of all truth regarding one of the greatest of the arts; a truth abundantly manifest throughout the works of the masters, yet strangely lost to view today. Living as we do in an age that tends to deny divinity in anything, and that has subordinated the divinity in man to his fiendishness, we may be inclined to look upon Shelley's words without sympathy, or at least without understanding; and therefore it may help us to get a clearer view of poetry, and of the relation of current work to past attainment, if we pause to examine some of the implications of Shelley's pronouncement.

First let us observe how Shelley himself unconsciously illustrated the principle; how, in his own work, he caught glimmers, gleams and shadowings that seem to issue from some timeless realm beyond man, and embodied them in verse wherein their immortal essence has been preserved. The presence of that divinity is indicated in lines such as

> The awful shadow of some unseen Power
> Floats, though unseen, amongst us,—visiting
> This various world with as inconstant wing
> As summer winds that creep from flower to flower,

and likewise in

> The everlasting Universe of Things
> Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
> Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
> Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
> The source of human thought its tribute brings
> Of waters . . .

And the divinity transfuses his verse in many an inspired flight, such as

> The One remains, the many change and pass;
> Heaven's light for ever shines, Earth's shadows fly;
> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> Stains the white radiance of Eternity,
> Until Death tramples it to fragments.

But here, despite all the majesty of the images, the divinity is sobered by the glow of philosophic thought. Hence it is perhaps to be seen in an even purer form in other passages, where the passion and ecstasy of the poet sweep through the lines and

cause them to tremble like a harp in his hands. Surely, there was never a more perfect embodiment of this spirit than in "Ode to the West Wind":

Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is:
What if my leaves are falling like its own!
The tumult of thy mighty harmonies
Will take from both a deep, autumnal tone,
Sweet though in sadness. Be thou, spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

In these lines, as through all this magnificent poem, the very breath of the great tumultuous spirit of nature—the very breath of divinity—seems to be poured out, as it must have been poured through the heart of the poet. And in these lines the visitations of that divinity have been "redeemed from decay."

But turn to any of the giants—any of the great figures who have survived the poetic fads and politics of a day—and one may make similar observations. Shakespeare, in passages too numerous for quotation, gave a visible embodiment to the divinity within him, and (though writing impersonally) expressed much of the truth in these well-known lines:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

Yet it is not mere "airy nothing" that this poet bodies forth, but the deepest emotions of man as he looks into "the chronicles of wasted time," ponders "what dreams may come When we have shuffled off this mortal coil," or delivers himself of meditations regarding "life's fitful fever," or makes a tormented Lear cry out in his despair,

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the cocks!
You sulphurous and thought-executing fires,
Vault-couriers to oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head! And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Smite flat the thick rotundity of the world!

"The visitations of the divinity in man" were preserved by Milton (to mention only two examples out of a multitude) in the sonnet on his blindness, with the poignant concluding line, "They also serve who only stand and wait," and in the sonnet on his deceased wife, wherein the departed came to him in a dream, "vested all in white" and with veiled face, until in the end, "I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night." Wordsworth, celebrating the divinity in nature, also preserved the visitations of the divinity within himself when he wrote,

And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,

And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

Not less clearly did he embody that divinity in his celebrated "Ode":

There was a time when meadow, grove and stream,
The earth, and every common sight,
To me did seem
Apparalled in celestial light,
The glory and the freshness of a dream.

Here we find poetry presenting what Shelley terms "the interpenetration of a diviner nature through our own"—such an interpenetration as must always be the hallmark of the best poetry, whether we hear Tennyson singing of

Music that gentlier on the spirit lies
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes,

or whether Emily Brontë cries out from the palpitating depths of her being,

No coward soul is mine,
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere:
I see Heaven's glories shine,
And faith shines equal, arming me from fear,

or whether it is our own contemporary Masefield who finds voice,

O little self, within whose smallness lies
All that man was, and is, and will become,
Atom unseen that comprehends the skies,
And tells the tracks by which the planets roam.

In the best of Masefield, of de la Mare, and in a handful of other present-day poets, the "visitations of the divinity in man" may be seen and appear likely to be preserved. But where, in the vast majority of the lauded verse writers of to-day, is there any indication of anything that by the remotest construction of the term can be said to resemble divinity? Do we find it in T. S. Eliot, in lines so typical as

Lady, three white leopards sat under a juniper tree
In the cool of the day, having fed to satiety
On my legs my heart my liver and that which had been contained
In the hollow round of my skull. And God said
Can these bones live? Can these
Bones live?

Does one observe any suggestion of the divinity in man in Ezra Pound when he writes

Come, my songs, let us express our baser passions,
Let us express our envy of the man with a steady
job and no worry about the future?

Or does one see the divinity cropping up in Carl Sandburg in a "Psalm" such as the one beginning,

The policeman buys shoes slow and careful; the teamster buys
gloves slow and careful; they take care of their feet and
hands; they live on their feet and hands?

Possibly the policeman and the teamster do take care of their feet and hands; but there is something deeper—conceivably the thing that chiefly distinguishes a man from a microbe—of which the poet seems to have taken no care at all.

The above quotations, to be sure, are just average samples of modernism in poetry; they are in no way extreme, and do not even approach the levels to be found in our Marianne Moores, our Dylan Thomases, our E. E. Cummings and other current practitioners. But they are sufficient to illustrate the point; sufficient to show how our "advanced" verse writers, by the subjects they choose and even by the unmetrical and uninspiring form of their utterance, fail to preserve "the visitations of the divinity in man" not only because they are wanting in art, but because they give no indication of ever having seen or known or come into remote contact with divinity. And not having come into contact with divinity, they can make no appeal to that which is deepest, more vibrant, most majestic, more other-worldly, most timeless in the hearts and spirits of their readers; and, as a consequence, they can expect neither to leave a profound impress to-day nor to be remembered to-morrow.

Mill Valley, California. STANTON A. COBLENTZ.

Wines

I HAVE drunk deeply of vintage old and new,
And found that sense
The most responsive was to rich, intense,
Warm-blooded, liquid fire, and knew
That drunken, Heav'n was very near
—And you.

Oh set me down, sweet fate, upon a tavern floor,
And let me see across the ruby glow
The warmth of friendly eyes that know
My weakness and my greatness, and adore
With me, the distant background of a song
For evermore.

And waking in the morning, why then weep?
And is my love but of an hour,
And did our glasses kiss but to turn sour
Untasted? Give me sleep, a drunken sleep,
And waking—wine—more wine—
Drink deep.

Oh, thou, who art my cup of bitterness
So full, raise now thy acid lip to mine,
That I may drink strange sweet—not sweet the less—
Of love remembered in as stale a wine.

Anne Smith.

Sunset

TRAILING the last waggon load of light,
The sun trudges over the hill.
Wisps of crimson hay lie on the cloud roads,
The furrows overhead are purple-stubbled.

A horse and waggon along the ridge, faster
Than sunlight ride; their quivering shadows
Outlined vaguely on the heather. Sniffing the evening
They go, slipping, creaking on the stones.

The hill closes over
Horse and waggon.
Shadow and echo.

Margery Smith.

Words for My Godson

I HAVE gathered ripe words, three,
From my poet's granary;
Live them, son, and you will be
Living a saint's vocabulary.

1

First, Love. The divine
And the neighbourly—
The water and wine.
The structure of living,
Acceptance and giving.
Love, the quixotic
Anonymous partner—
And love, the erotic
Pursuit of the real,
The willing ordeal
On the knife-edge of rapture.

Love that outweighs
The opportune hour,
The irrational days.
Love self-revealing:
The wound and the healing.
Love, the celestial
Fusion of forces—
Love, the terrestrial
Object of being.
The instant of seeing,
The flight and the capture.

2

Follows, Compassion,
The grey dove of virtue.
Less in the fashion
Than twin brother Pity,
—The one in the City—
Pity, the patron,
The neat benefaction:
Bazaars and the matron
With cheque for the vicar—
Compassion is thicker,
The blood, with the offering

Compassion partakes;
It runs with the hare,
And when sorrow awakes
Is first at the bed-side—
Compassion's the red tide
The flows from the heart.
The exquisite spendthrift,
As eager to part
With time as with treasure;
But secret the measure
And silent the proffering.

3

Lastly, Courage. The word
Embracing in kinship
The emigrant bird,
And the far pioneer—
The hand with the spear,
The tigress defending—
The courage instinctive
In birth and in ending.
Contempt for the feckless,
The prize for the reckless,
The world for the daring.
But courage of mind,
The lion of reason—
Is courage to bind
A man to his duty,
A soul to its beauty.
The courage deflecting
The fear in the mirror—
The courage protecting
The meek from oppression.
The final confession,
The naked, unsparing.

Son, you ask me what of truth?
A question that proclaims your youth.
Truth is each man's personal vision,
The argument beyond decision.

Juanita Peirse.

The New Home

I FOUND my mother weeping,
She would not tell me why,
O'er the blue jug,
And the hearth rug
Which I had been to buy.

I heard my father sighing,
I did not let him know,
His look was drear,
I saw a tear
On my tablecloth of snow.

I heard my father sighing,
I saw my father's pain,
Yet the bird flies
When her mate cries
Never to come again. . . .

How I wish I'd never noticed,
For memories will disturb,
Though the clock ticks,
And the flame flicks
The new and shining curb.

Thomas A. King.

Private Summer

YOU breathe, my love, as the warm west wind
That brims with the wordless songs of birds;
You speak, my love, as the river sings—
A whimsical, musical flow of words:
Your laugh is a garden of sparkling sun
A-swing on the leaves in drops of rain;
Your sleep has the quiet of the morning grass
Where only the moon-spun dew has lain.

But oh! But oh! When I take my love . . . .
A wild rose blooms where the west wind blows:
The west wind blows all day, all day,
And night looks long—on a fallen rose!

Francis Stephenson.

Spring Song

BUGLE thy sweet moments at thy choice
Thou common little bird of priceless voice,
Throstle—Sentinel of Song and heart,
Enraptured for thine artless art.

Mavis—with thy lute the apple bloom
Blow music where its pinky tassels plume!
Harken to his mellowed orisons
Ye Poets, Lovers, Daffodilly Blondes!

Robin—pour thy tiny stream of song
About the paths I daily walk along;
Elfin are thy ways and coy that peep
Enquires the reason for the hours I keep.

Jenny Wren—a button of delights,
Her parasol uplifts in mottled lights,
Warbling tender undertones for Spring,
And bobbing where the Lenten Lilies sing.

Sing Lark! Sing thou minstrel of the skies!
O bursting heart that carols till it dies!
Mortal and Immortal gift—the Bard
A golden urn has pieced each heaven-spilled shard.

Chaffinch—lilts where blossoms play the morn
His ditties for the peeping barleycorn,
Breast red, epaulettes of lily white,
Kings Highwayman and fiery little Wight!

Spring Chorale seems restless till he comes—
The Cuckoo, his errant flute benumbs;
Jester of the Fields and Cuckold Knight,
Thou art forgiven roving Eremite!

Arcadian Lyrist, Philomel,
Pour out thy pearls of sound O Sylvian Bell!
Beasthood—Sorrow—with your coat of mail,
Come listen—listen—to the Nightingale!

(D.S.O., Lt.-Col., U.N.R.R.A.) *W. T. Shorthose.*

Foreboding

WHAT now may hide in this impending shade
Has no intent of evil nor of hate,
Yet of this hidden thing I am afraid
Who boasted to the day of conquered Fate.
For here awaits me, ambushed still in Time,
Set in the path from which no foot can stray,
A formless thing yet in its power sublime
As the fixed law which governs night and day.

Some deed of mine draws near to claim its due,
Deaf to entreaty so the two accord,
A sin perhaps, with consequence to rue,
No virtue, surely, harbouring reward,
Else were I fearless, lifted into song,
Who stand convicted in my heart of wrong.

II

Yet deep within me dwells the certainty
There is no bias in the hand of Fate—
That all creation is my guaranty
Of justice, more than Man's, immaculate;
And though he be my judge yet still I know
Injustice is his least enduring crime,
And truth prevails for though God's mills be slow
And life is short there is no end to Time.

So here, is nought of evil but my own,
None but myself has cast this shadow there
Where waits a venomed nettle, idly sown,
Which I must pluck and in my bosom wear;
And none but I shall feel the smart in me
Nor, if I triumph, share my ecstasy. *H. W. Harding.*

The Pattern

THROUGH the window of my room
I look up at the stars,
and far (who knows how far?)
beyond the farthest star
at starless deeps
no mortal eye can fathom.
But the quiet mind may fathom
those deep, dark, silent spaces—
vacant, yet not meaningless;
empty, yet not barren,
no, not barren,
but giving birth to children
whose bright faces
in un-selfconscious loveliness
look down on all the watching worlds
and me.

The unnumbered and unnumberable stars
with dreaming pools between;
darkness giving life to light;
the seen and the unseen;
the tireless, regular rise and fall
of all
the uncurbed, unresting seas;
the sowing and the reaping;
the laughter and the weeping;
receiving and giving;
dying and living;
living, dying, giving, receiving—
all one wondrous Pattern weaving.

Beneath life's uncouth notes,
Its bitter, poignant cries;
beneath the jangling jarring sounds
that shatter the world's worn nerves,
softly, sweetly, holily,
I hear the soundless music of the skies;
I feel the rhythmic beat
of all this mighty universe,
and know
that beneath its ebb and flow
lies hid the pattern of my life,
the pattern of my little life,
now sad, now sweet,
but ever knowing more
of blessing than of curse.
The music that I hear within my heart

is part
of an eternal harmony;
my laughter and my tears
one with the joy and sorrow
of the everlasting spheres.

Peter Bayford.

THREE LYRICS BY ROSINA RAMSEY:

I—Reality

MY love, my love,
You are going from me,
But you never were mine
For all to see.

I fain would have seen
From the sheen of your eyes
A message for me—
But 'twas only surprise.

Surprise at my daring
To love one so great,
And perhaps the thought
That it was too late.

Ah! love, my heart's love
Whate'er shall betide
I must love thee wherever
The dark storm shall ride.

II—The Great Leveller

DEATH, the great leveller,
None can divide;
Rich man and poor man
Lie side by side.
Hurt heart and light heart,
Gay heart and sad,
Braggart and brave heart,
Proud heart and bad.

Some will have graves
Others be ash
Some in the air
Torn apart with a crash.
Others go deeper
With sea water balm—
And for those in the trenches
The bayonet's long arm:
But in the end
As the leveller flashes
God's arms meet all
As the blinding flash crashes.

III—Good Friday

POOR seared souls
That have by fate
To walk together day by day;
Poor warped minds
That are so smeared and smirched,
Why chain the sun
And catch the sunbeams
In those dark grey clouds
Until the dread of dawn
Shall start a drearier day again?

Dawn, dawn, we cry,
But does dawn alter
A fate so cruel
A fate that is not
Colder than a grave,
An endless length
Of tear-dimmed cloud,
An endless length of grey?

Rosina Ramsey.

Prayer for My Son

CHILD, for you
No echo and no murmur of the storm,
No far-flung battle-cry, no Pyrrhic song,
Nor any place among the armoured throng,
—But these for you:—
Laughter and all love's loveliness, unmarred
By death which falls beside the April rain;
Flowers that blooming once shall bloom again
In England's gardens, green and daisy-starred.
And others, child, to share your carefree days,
Strong-limbed, clear-eyed, and innocent of all
That brought to childhood's summer autumn's fall,
And led small footsteps down uncharted ways.
This also, child—
Faith that this land for which our blood was spilled
Shall be your Heaven, should you make it so—
That fires which we have lit may flame and glow—
White with the dreams we dreamed, by you fulfilled.

Mary More.

Weltschmerz

HERE by the silent sands I walk,
As I walked long ago,
The cypress trees still point to Heaven,
And dusk is blue and slow.

The winds that chased the waves all day
Have sighed themselves to sleep,
But my unquiet thoughts awake,
And wistful vigil keep.

No strength I find in loveliness,
No joy, no healing breath;
Its happiness is ancient dust,
And all its life is death.

Perpetual grief at twilight time
In memory shall remain
Of holy things that touched me not,
Of beauty that gave pain.

The tears of life shall haunt me still,
And still the turbid wave
Of restlessness shall flow and break,
And flow beyond the grave.

Until the soul is calmed at last,
Until the sacred power
To drink the springs of pure delight
Shall grant one perfect hour.

When swift my spirit shall return,
With the blue dusk to be
At peace on shores where cypress trees
Point towards eternity.

Margaret M. Bowles.

Peace and War

O GOLDEN sun enfolding mead and tilth,
Benign and wise,
Unseemly are thine unaverted eyes;
It is not well
That thou shouldst look complacently on hell,
Or shine upon those fields of blood and filth,
And blandly tolerate
God's wrath, man's hate.

O tranquil moonlight, falling like silver dust
Through the clean air,
Thy mesh of netted beams is but a snare;
Put out your lights,
Ye star-illumined peace-apparalled nights,
Since only in the darkness may we trust,
Hiding ourselves in holes
Like the blind moles.

O liquid notes from joyous throats of birds
In budding brakes,
Where Spring like a rejoicing bride awakes,
Be still, be still;
Hark to the breeze that bears o'er plain and hill
A distant muttering of war, whose words
Are murder and whose breath
Is death.

Why are we mocked by free and lovely things
Being brought to birth,
When killing is the order of the earth?
Have done, have done.
Who cares for callous birds or cynic sun?
Seeing all the promise of light and blossom and wings,
Is come only to be
Blasphemy.

T. Bouch.

Gerard Manley Hopkins

HE played not on the pipes of Pan
To glut with heady strife
A short and unreturning span
Of life.

For no bright orts of Bacchic bowl
Dredged he, to rue the cost
When glory fashioned for his soul
Was lost.

With sober thought, with molten word
Annealed by Sinai's breath,
He forged linked mail his soul to gird
Through death.

Ambition's purple rags he scorned:
Poor, in Christ's servant's dress,
His stature kingly, he adorned
Success.

In stilly spaces far from sound
Of dreaded Ichabod
He wandered wisely, and he found
His God.

D. F. Mace.

Magdalene

MARY MAGDALENE, in your room at set of sun,
Preparing the cosmetics of your trade,
Cool and scented, dark and lovely,
When preparing tasks were done,
Seated by your mirrors, resting,
Where your coloured gowns were laid;
Mary Magdalene, scarlet woman of the street.
To men you sold your body, in the dusk,
And I wonder if they noticed there was something softly sweet
In the aura that embraced you; that it was not scented musk?
Mary Magdalene, with that dark inviting look,
Quite conscious of the power you could wield:
Oft I wonder, Scarlet Lady, what could be the price you took
When your townsmen came awooing and you found it sweet to yield?
Mary Magdalene, I sometimes think you sought
To bring an understanding to your sphere.
I feel certain, Magdalene, you were never wholly bought:
That you had at least one virtue when the Master first drew near.

Mary Magdalene, others had been told to "Go",
When the Pharisees refused to cast a stone.
So He must have understood you: knew what others did not know,
And He knew the ground was fertile once the good seed had been sown.
Mary Magdalene, I have seen your painted race,
Hard and coarse, by the sea-front, stand and wait.
Foul-mouthed groups of artificial girls,
They come to take their place,
Women, minus understanding, by the brothel's gaudy gate.

Mary Magdalene, I can only hope and pray
You are brooding o'er your sisters as they toss
On the planes of human passions. You must turn to them one day,
Take the paint from haggard faces,
Put your hands beneath their Cross.
Mary Magdalene, they who bear this bitter load,
They who fill the cups of Lust to the brim,
May in this life gain experience, and pay the debt they owed.
Let them prove to be the fertile ground
When they have gazed on HIM.

John Whitehouse.

There's a Divinity?

NO man may share another's dream
Through love or long propinquity;
Each drifts upon a widening stream
Out to an unknown sea.
Viewed from a hill-top far away
Rockets that soar in spray and sound,
Droop in pin-points of silver-green
Towards the silent ground.

With what unreasoning eagerness
We match our wishes to our mood!
A casual finger-touch becomes
Eternal brotherhood.

Conquerors for a moment, we
Reach out beyond the things we hate,
Complain and strive, yet pathlessly
Approach the frontier gate.

Ne'er strikes that blinding certainty,
Damascus-white, across our eyes,
Whereby Creation, Time and Death
Contain no least surprise.

Alexander A. Buist.

Leonardo da Vinci

LEONARDO, Leonardo the terrible, who could draw
Beauty and horror with an even mind,
Drew this old warrior, and with such a smile
As grown men wear watching the play of children.

See, the smile said, see this my antique warrior.
No earthly war, nor brawl of common blood
Was ever his delight; in faery fields he slew,
Monsters, not men, his foes, in faery fields,
On grass unwithered in a thousand years
He gave the deathstroke. See, my antique warrior,
His armour beaten out in flowers and wings,
Scrolls, leaves and lions' heads, and in his look
The iron courage of a steadfast soul.

So smiled he, Leonardo, Leonardo the terrible.
Then put away his warrior and his smile
For a grotesque, a hideous, wreathes its vicious brows
In mockery with a garland, or, devoid of ruth
A monstrous foot dissects; with pencil hovering
Ponders a frightful instrument of war.

Beauty and horror examines he unmoved,
Probing a corpse by the red glare of torches, rifling
The empty house of life, whose pallid walls
Helpless yield up their treasury of knowledge.

Anon he plunges where sad rivers fill
Ravines and chasms, dark primaeval places
Where never mortal came, nor echo sounds
But the harsh shrieking of ill-omened birds
Dying upon the melancholy air.

Imagines he the Deluge, broken fountains of the deep
Upthrown and merged in heaven's cataracts,
Men, cattle, thundered out of life, racked bones of trees
Confounded all in fearful overthrow.
Neptune the havoc rides with wild arm brandishing
And streaming hair, his maddened team inspires
Rearing and plunging through the roaring sea.

From all the fury of the elements, he comes
The terrible Leonardo, to a rocky place,
A cavern deep, dark green and shadowy,
Where a pale Virgin and her angel kneel
By flowers that need no sun, with their eternal charge
The infant Christ, and he, the solitary, John.

How looked he then, the terrible Leonardo
When he drew Mother Anne, whose lips and cheek
Smile new from Paradise, refreshing minds
Long misted in the turmoil of the world
With a vague memory of the golden age.

And John the man, desert-inhabiting,
He made more subtle than the Gioconda, she
Who sits her marble chair as on a throne
Mocking the world: for John the world despised
Standing alone, and for that Leonardo loved him
As never living woman, made him woman-man,
With such a look as lured the Sons of God,
Forsaking heaven for the homes of men.

And Christ's last meal on earth, that upper room
With Venom at the board, whose guilty hand
Fumbles the dish: O Leonardo, there
Beauty and horror in sublime accord
Majestically move to their appointed end.

What ponders now thy strange soul, Leonardo?
That power controlling passion, all-devouring thirst
For knowledge, and more knowledge; questioning
The very saints in heaven, undismayed
Before the seraphim? or with considering eye
Marking the flame infernal wreathe and swirl
In the red grandeur of the gulfs of hell?

It may be thine no single human soul
But Man's epitome, from age to age
Recurring, as a torch of flesh and blood
Held high upon the path of mortal struggle
In thy Prime Mover's hand, whose justice holds
Worlds on the brink of chaos. Leonardo,
The even mind, the brain above the flesh, the strength
Able to daunt Medusa. They two met
Full facing on that daemon-haunted shore
The hissing serpents striking from her brow,
'Twas she had turned to stone.

Julian Rivers.

Fallen in Italy

Beneath the olive and the vine
They rest, whom War has spent.
Surely their clay makes oil and wine
A greater Sacrament.

(Colonel, A.F., Italy, Jan., '45.)

David Tennant

The Personality of Lord Alfred Douglas

THE life and work of the Lord Alfred Douglas, and hence his lamented death on March 20th, are of international as well as national concern. Born on October 22, 1870, at Ham Hill, Worcester, the third son of the eighth Marquess of Queensberry, he was sent to school at Winchester and then to Magdalen College, Oxford. His youthful beauty was notable—"a golden boy"—and in the wealthy and distinguished surroundings of his nurture, his exceptional talents and charm seemed to promise a dazzling life. Unspoiled by worldliness he was capable of the deepest emotion and loyalty in friendship. His father's excessive zeal on his behalf led to the well-known "Oscar Wilde tragedy," and subjected Douglas to a long tempering of consequential litigation; so that to many his reputation was clouded by the cruel, sometimes fantastic, often well-nigh incredible malice with which litigation was pursued against him. Let it all rest.

To-day we are interested in the poet, and the man from whom the poet was made. Fused by mental and spiritual torture in the fiery furnace, he held fast to his poetic integrity, and for some years before his death he had been recognised as England's greatest living poet. Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch wrote of him in 1939: "I always held his sonnets the finest written in his time." Nevertheless, spiteful enmity and the cheap journalists' fetish of "news value" so distorted the ideas of the public about him that few knew him as he really was. It is no small achievement at the end of a life of such skirmishes and injustices that in his seventy-fourth year he still glowed with his youthful passionate sincerity, that he still gathered round him young people who cared for quality in literature to whom he would expound the fundamental laws of the poetic art in day-long monologues, traversing the rich fields of history and current affairs. An octet from his sequence "In Excelsis" pictures himself truly and finely:

> "I have within me that which still defies
> This generation's bloat intelligence,
> Which is the advocate of my defence
> Against the indictment of the world's assize.
> Clutching with bleedings hands my hard-won prize,
> Immeasurably bought by fierce expense
> Of blood and sweat and spirit-harnessed sense,
> I keep the steadfast gaze of tear-washed eyes."

In his high poetry he exhibited a quality seldom equalled, and surpassed perhaps only by three other poets in all our history. No reader equipped to assay can fail to perceive the pure gold of his authentic poetry. It will survive when the dust and turmoil of his litigious personal career are forgotten. Best known as a sonnet writer (though some of his lyrics are delightful), he considered the sonnet the touch-stone of poetry. His own sonnets are his most admired work, and justify the recent broadcast of some of them in a programme with Shakespeare's, when the B.B.C. claimed that he ranked next to Shakespeare as our greatest sonnet writer.

In *The Times* on Wednesday, March 21st, an appreciative obituary column, headed "A Poet of Distinction," gives a good general account of his life and should be referred to by all interested in him. It does not mention the publication of his first volume of poems by the Mercure de France in 1896. *The City of the Soul*, which

they quote as his first, came three years later. I append with dates a list of his principal works. *The Times* does less than justice to his poetry when it says: "His sonnets are too far from the modern development . . . to be in many hands . . . but they have won and will go on winning ardent admiration from a few." Lord Alfred Douglas told me personally that his various books of poems have sold twelve thousand copies, hardly "a few" in comparison with most modern poets!

In addition to his high poetry wherein he exercised his supreme skill with evocative words and images, Lord Alfred Douglas published four volumes of light verse. His political and satiric verse has a searing and corrosive power against those whose ways he detested and despised. Perhaps the wounds they dealt account for the less than justice that has been done him in England.

The Art of Poetry was to him a sacred thing. He would tolerate no money-changers in the Temple, nor shoddy materials in recent annexes. In his preface to his own *Lyrics* he says:

"When remonstrated with, your anti-formal heretic invariably tells you that he writes like that because he 'prefers it that way' or that he wishes to produce a 'rugged effect' (much virtue in that 'rugged'!). If one of the poetical heresiarchs (say, Mr. T. S. Eliot) would write even one solitary good sonnet in the Petrarchan form, I would begin to believe that his 'rugged effects' might possibly be deliberate manifestation of deliberate art. But until that happens I shall continue to say that he and all the rest of them write their bad poetry because they are utterly unable to write good poetry, and preach their heresies on the same principle as the fox who lost his brush, in Æsop's fables" . . . "I maintain that good poetry cannot be written without sincerity any more than it can be written without style. The emotion it expresses must be deeply and passionately felt or the poem remains a mere exercise in verse, more or less accomplished. It is the combination of fire in the heart and ice in the brain which produces great poetry."

Douglas used principally the difficult Petrarchan sonnet for his own self-expression, partly because he felt the creative stimulus the rigid form demands. He did not write easily, though his finished work reads with such limpid flow that it seems (as great poetry should) so inevitable that the reader imagines that it was easy to compose. As a master craftsman he knew that easily read poetry is difficult to write, and the "moderns" who spew up undigested maunderings have not begun their apprenticeship as craftsmen.

Writing to me in 1939 he said: "Your article in *English* is splendid. It's the best thing about poetry that has been written for many years. As you know from my Prefaces, my method of writing poetry is not quite the process you describe. I mean that though the *idea* of the poem is an inspiration which is born suddenly in my mind, the actual *writing* of it is to me, more often than not, a patient and hard-concentrated effort. Very often it is really a desperate effort. But, of course, not all poets write their poetry in quite the same way, and I can only say that I wish I *could* dash off poetry in inspiration. The best poetry always produces the *impression* of being inevitable and having flowed out easily and naturally, but at the back of it I think there must be a hard struggle. The art consists in producing that appearance of ease and inevitableness. At any rate it is so with me."

I have a large number of letters from him sprinkled with points of literary technique

and criticism. In 1944, for instance, to my note asking him what he thought of rhymes ending in *ness* he replied, "Strictly speaking it is an error to rhyme two words ending in 'ness,' or any words with the same consonant sound such as 'bell' and 'syllable,' for a perfect rhyme there must be a difference in the consonant, thus 'bitterness' is not a good rhyme for 'loneliness,' but it rhymes perfectly with 'spiritless' " . . . "I myself have rhymed 'ness' with 'ness' in some of my sonnets, but I recognise that it is a blemish. I also have 'bell' 'syllable' which is bad. It matters less if the two words ending in question do not come next to each other, but if other lines intervene. You will see in *The Times* to-morrow an announcement of the death of my dear wife. It is a frightful blow to me. I knew she was dying weeks ago. . . ."

He was deeply devoted to his wife, who had written charming poems, some about himself. *The Times* speaks of his as "a marriage checkered, as the public came to know, by the unhappiness which dogged him," yet though he lived in a flat by himself, she in a house nearby in the same town of Hove, he went to see her every day and spoke of her in terms of tenderest affection. I once asked him why, since his circumstances were difficult, he did not again join forces with his wife and live in the same house with her. With a whimsical laugh he said, "Poets are difficult to live with, and I am a specially difficult poet." The series of sonnets to his wife, "To Olive," are among the very loveliest he has written:

"Yet surely thou wast there when life was sweet,
(We walked knee-deep in flowers) and thou wast there,
When in dismay and sorrow and unrest,
With weak bruised hands and wounded bleeding feet,
I fought with beasts and wrestled with despair
And slept (how else?) upon thine unseen breast."

After having the privilege of his friendship for some years, having enjoyed long talks in his own house and in mine, I arrived at the state of temerity when I could occasionally deliberately prick him with a little goad, so I once pointed out to him that in one of his most famous and beautiful sonnets he had a faulty line. In the sonnet "London" beginning:

"See what a mass of gems the city wears
Upon her broad live bosom! row on row
Rubies and emeralds and amethysts glow."

In the third line the stresses and syllables are wrong, and the conjunction of the words "and amethysts" is jerky and ugly. He was first indignant, saying that it had satisfied all the critics for forty years and I was the first person to notice anything wrong with it.

Our discussions went on for about two years on this line. In another letter he wrote to me "Seven years ago in my own author's copy opposite the line 'Rubies and emeralds,' etc., in the margin I wrote, 'This line is a syllable too long.' It's odd that I had never spotted it before. It was written nearly fifty years ago, when I was twenty-three. Seven years ago it was impossible to correct the printed line so I just made a mental note that I would put it right the next time I had a new edition. Nobody else except you apparently has ever noticed it, I suppose because the alleged critics are so used to modern 'poets' having lines of eleven and twelve syllables mixed up with decasyllabic lines that they accepted it as a matter of course and they probably

have no idea that it is wrong. Yeats for example does it all the time. But to me it is of course anathema." I suggested "sapphires," and in another letter he replied, "Of course 'Sapphires' is the word I want for that line. Anyhow, the lights of London at night are more often like sapphires than amethysts, 'Rubies and emeralds and sapphires glow.'" In the latest edition, the miniature reprint of his Sonnets, published by the Richards Press in 1943, that is how it appears.

A poet to whom I recommended Lord Alfred's sonnets wrote to him that "they had given him more pleasure than any discovery since "Lycidas." Showing the kindly interest he took in the young, Lord Alfred shortly afterwards wrote to me, "Young Raoul Pugh writes asking me to look at his sonnets, which I have told him I will do, and criticise them. I have replied also by telling him that long experience has taught me that people *don't like* having their sonnets or poems criticised. They like you to *praise* them. But that is not the same as criticising them and sometimes it cannot be conscientiously done. I also told him that when I was his age I never dreamed of sending my poems to well-known writers asking for comments. I was too confident that my stuff was at least as good as theirs to do this. You may call this conceit, but all the best poets have always known that they were good. The trouble is that bad poets often think the same! I told him that if he really was a good poet nothing would keep him down and that he must just go ahead. I pointed out to Pugh that out of all the thousands of English sonnets written in the last four hundred years there were only about a hundred good ones, and I would be hard put to it to name so many. I told him if he wrote *six* great sonnets in his *whole lifetime* he would be immortal!"

In contrast to the long-wrought perfection of his high poetry, Lord Alfred could dash off verbally brilliant humorous verse, bitterly sarcastic, corrosively entertaining exposures of those he despised. In my house during one week-end he scribbled on scraps of paper half a dozen Clerihews, all about distinguished people, convulsing the few privileged who saw them. This swift production of rollicking verse ran parallel with his serious poetry since he was young. His humorous poetry, "Pongo Papers," "The Placid Pug," and others are considered by those who enjoy such work as among the best of their kind. *Truth*, the *Evening Standard*, and other papers in the last few years published some of his biting political satires.

His prose was less studied than his poetry, forceful, and written swiftly like his numerous, entertaining letters. Of his published prose, particularly his autobiography, one of the salient features is his truthfulness and balance about facts so harsh as to have seared and warped a lesser man to distorted presentation.

A little incident revealing how he must have been hurt by his friends in the past, how sensitive he was, and how affectionate, arose in 1941. By a curious coincidence he and I, unaware of what the other was doing, each wrote on the same evening a sonnet on Winston Churchill. [These were ultimately both published on the same page in *Kingdom Come*, Summer 1941.] We sent off the sonnets in manuscript simultaneously to each other, and by chance my reply to his got lost in the post. He wrote most disturbedly thinking that I had been offended, and when I told him that my letter was merely lost and I had been delighted by the coincidence, he replied, "Of course, it would be *impossible* for you to be so small as to be annoyed by my sonnet coinciding with yours. I ought to have known better than to think that your

failure to acknowledge my sonnet could *possibly* be due to such a cause. But I was genuinely puzzled by your silence and I thought it just possible that you might be offended with me. . . ." What sensitiveness, and what a degree of past wounding by others who called themselves his friends this displays: it well-nigh draws tears from one's eyes.

The great friendship of his life was that of Oscar Wilde, for whom, in spite of revulsions of feeling caused by the treacheries of others, he felt a deep spiritual love to the end. I well remember a luncheon in my house since this war began when he told us all in vivid phrases, creating much laughter, of the entertaining fortnight he and Oscar Wilde had had together writing *The Importance of Being Earnest* in a lodging-house on the sea front at Worthing; Lord Alfred sitting in the sun on the curved balcony, Wilde dashing in and out from the inner room, sometimes to write down repartee Lord Alfred shot at him, or to capture the composite and excruciatingly funny Ernest dialogue, the two gay spirits making a hilarious game of the whole thing.

Lord Alfred's judgment of Wilde as a poet is penetrating. He wrote to me in 1942, "With regard to Oscar Wilde's sonnets there are no really great ones only almost a dozen pretty good. One of the best is 'The Sin was mine, I did not understand,' which he told me was about me, but I subsequently discovered that he wrote it before he met me! You know what I am about sonnets! It is no use pretending, is it? I am positively snowed over with sonnets people send me! I find frequently they are quite good *up to a point*, but I do not see any *great* ones among them. As for Oscar Wilde's play, *The Ideal Husband*, it is technically one of his best. It acts awfully well. Gielgud ought to put it on, but the masterpiece is *The Importance of Being Earnest* to my mind. I think, too, four of his comedies are very good and infinitely better than Sheridan. In poetry the *Sphinx* is a terrific *tour de force*, a great achievement."

Bernard Shaw and Lord Alfred conducted for a long time a correspondence surely destined some day to become famous, Shaw being addressed by Lord Alfred as "Saint Christopher," Shaw addressing Lord Alfred as "Childe Harold." Lord Alfred often expressed an affectionate regard for Shaw, and the correspondence carried on and on, finally meeting disaster when Shaw persisted in his claim that he himself was a great poet. There is not space here to develop this entertaining theme, but doubtless the public will enjoy the whole correspondence some day. Meanwhile this is Lord Alfred's personal comment on it to me, "Shaw surpassed himself by writing two of the most idiotic letters I have ever read. I enclose the second of these and my brief reply written at the foot of it. It is extraordinary that such a clever man should write such nonsense, but he is determined to bolster up his own self-adulation and to support the strange illusion that he is 'a great poet.' I have written a sonnet about Bevin which is a regular 'stinker.' When I get it quite right I will send you a copy."

The interest Douglas took in the technical structure of sonnets led him to rage at the numerous travesties from time to time appearing in reputable papers whose editors should know better. In an effort to remind young poets of the rules of sonnet writing he consented to act as judge in the competition instituted by the POETRY REVIEW for which a prize of £20 was given for the best of the sonnets submitted. The judging and writing a report on these was almost the last thing his failing strength permitted him to do.

He was sometimes pleased by a sonnet sent personally to him, and for the one I wrote on himself returned "Many thanks for the charming sonnet. It is a most kind and generous tribute to the aged poet and also a jolly good sonnet." It ran:

"Incomparable merit wreathes your brow
For out of turbulence and spirit's stress,
Lowering darkness, arid bitterness,
You hammered beauty that adorns you now.
The grave devours what poets disallow,
But beauty carved in words all must confess
Rises above our mortal littleness
To glitter like the pointer in the Plough.

A far posterity is in your debt
For memorable lines you have bequeathed,
Rich gratitude will rise in hearts unborn.
Life will enhance, and never can forget
The soft emotion that in song you breathed,
The brilliant crown of words that you have worn."

MARIE CARMICHAEL STOPES,

D.Sc., Ph.D., F.G.S., F.R.S.L.

Lord Alfred Douglas's principal works are:

Poetry: Poems (with French prose translation) (Le Mercure de France), 1896; The City of the Soul (Grant Richards), 1899 (3rd. ed. John Lane), 1908; Sonnets (The Academy Publishing Company), 1909; Collected Poems (Martin Secker), 1919; In Excelsis (Martin Secker), 1924; Collected Satires (Fortune Press), 1927; Complete Poems (Martin Secker), 1928; Sonnets and Lyrics, 2 vols. (Rich and Cowan), 1935; Selection of Poems translated into French poetry by Francis d'Avilla (Albert Messein, Paris), 1937; A Selection in the Augustan Series of English Poets (Edited by Edward Thompson. Benn), 6d. edition, 1926. *Humorous Verse:* Tails with a Twist (Edward Arnold), 1896; The Duke of Berwick (Smithers), 1898; The Placid Pug (Duckworth), 1906; The Pongo Papers (Greening), 1907; Collected Edition (Martin Secker), 1925. *Biography:* Autobiography (Martin Secker), 1929 (Translated into French, German and Spanish); Without Apology (Martin Secker), 1938.

Literary Criticism: The True History of Shakespeare's Sonnets (Martin Secker), 1933; The Principles of Poetry: An Address delivered before the Royal Society of Literature on September 2, 1943; Preface on Poetry in Wartime Harvest, by Dr. Marie Stopes.

Franklin Roosevelt

(VALE ATQUE AVE)

Bid him the long farewell—his race is run:
But, like the dying Sun
Whose setting sometimes gilds the Eastern skies
Where the new dawn will rise,
Passing he heralds glories yet unwon.

Edward Vandermere Fleming.

A Country and a Climate

SOMEWHERE in Islington the blackened husk of a church tower rises out of ruin. The walls and roof have disappeared: the paving-stones are green with nettles: a double row of scarred truncated pillars gestures forlornly to the sky. In the middle of them a headless eighteenth-century statue meditates above its bones, at its feet an old boot, behind it, abrupt in the wreckage, a spar of brick looped with tatters of wallpaper and still bearing absurdly on a nail a weatherbeaten oleograph of the Prince Consort. Up and down the streets under that face so blandly smiling out of the past, men and women go by on their ordered business, unaware that the crowded commonplace of London is repeating surrealisms grimmer and more ominous than Epstein's *Rock Drill* or the charged perspectives of Chirico.

We are living in a world where every day death's antic capers outdo the inventions of nightmare. Salvador Dali, in his more paranoiac moods, used to paint a singular smiling face looking down on inexplicable chaos. The smile is glittering, mirthless, mocking, triumphant. It is the mad smile of unreason watching the death of the cosmos. And that is where we are now, in the nightmare years.

In the midst of this general and seemingly endless collapse men have remembered things long forgotten. When everything is lost the only thing left is the refusal to admit that loss: when all is defeated the only thing left is defiance. Not even the ghost lives now of the kind Prince Consort's world: all that endures unchanging is what has disappeared. Reality is never a newspaper headline. Where pyramids have their term and obelisks crumble, all that remains of man is his epitaph. For words only are immortal. If we took our poets seriously—well, we might still fall into the ditch, but we should not fall into it blindly: even now, at the eleventh hour, we might climb out again. When wealth and power fail us, older values come alive; when there is no hope in the material world, a different world enters more vividly into being, Blake's world or Traherne's. The *Tao* is only absolutely there when everything else is absolutely nowhere.

War most vividly and precisely reveals this temporal horror and its sole alternative. War doesn't produce poets, it doesn't even encourage them; it kills them, as it has killed Alun Lewis and Sidney Keyes. But the very blackness of its surface hell drives men to deeper levels, drives them deeper and deeper in a quest for the things which remain stable where all is tumbling, sends them in search, among other things, of the poets. There is no more of a dividing line between one kind of poetry and another than there is between sleeping and waking: there are as many levels in poetry as there are between coma and cosmic awareness. And at the deepest level, where the mind bores into meanings beyond meaning, lies that profound fusion of the inspired and the prophetic which retains for hundreds of years its power to blow material civilisations sky-high, like the dynamite in the *Dhammapada* or the *Tao te Ching*.

The attainment of this level, so much beyond words that they can only be sparks to set alight or signposts to direct the creative imagination, is what alone makes poetry the thing revealed, simply itself, incommunicable in any other form. And, if the spirit of the poet reaches this level, there is never any doubt; the fieriest rhetoric, the most dexterous technique, cannot deceive us for more than the moment. It is among the most precious of time's functions to wear away all but that enduring and mysterious core.

A very small handful of the poems written during this war possesses that quality of detachment from the stream of events which gives integrity. Among them is, I think, a sequence of nine poems called *Who Live in Unity**; only seventeen pages, but long enough in days when the stage is so crowded that poetry to have an audience at all must be short. Long enough at least to be an experience of truth on that other level, a map of a country of the spirit most of us don't enter.

These nine poems are the story of the relationship between two lovers seeking unity in each other, seeking to penetrate the "walls of glass" between their private worlds. The sequence begins with the meeting of two personalities on a railway station, and ends with the communion of two spirits before the altar; in between it explores all the moods of love, the clash of wills, the uneasiness and the fulfilment in that harmony when

> All the colours will run out and blur
> The picture-book of selves.

Through the first three poems runs an undercurrent of doubt and anxiety, an acute sense of love as a groping over barriers of strangeness, of life as a sleep with inexplicable brief awakenings. The poems are a handful of days shaped to a design, or broken away from the design because of those

> Elementals,
> Bits of themselves, agents without a name—
> Call them perhaps Ambition, Jealousy,
> Or Pride.

The fourth poem is a statement of the unity which is born of simplicity; the fifth a reiteration of the doubt, a moving expression of the fading of the inward sun, which leads to the central discord of division, the Quarrel in the sixth poem. The seventh, while re-stating the themes of separateness and division, suggests their resolution in the attitude of mind which comes alive and aware through thankfulness and acceptance. The eighth is a climax in exactly the opposite direction to the sixth, the final harmony of complete at-one-ness; and the last is a magnificent utterance of the theme of the whole sequence, the unity of man under love.

The nine poems have an almost formally *musical* structure. One could indeed describe them as one would describe a sonata—the introduction, at first tentative, of the recurring images; the gradual building-up of themes into a coherent whole; the *adagio* of the fourth and fifth, the swift discordant change of mood in the sixth, and the final resolution in the last three poems.

Indeed, it is from music and the two cardinal simplicities of fire and water that nearly all the images are drawn. These three things express the idea of unity, the wholeness, the rhythm, the shining harmony. For how else but in the "fugal and suggestive" language of symbols can an idea be felt in the blood as well as known in the brain?

> They
> Were tuned to its vibrato candle-light
> As to a low recorder—using words,
> Yet hardly noticing the words, so rapt
> In the fine harmonies mere thinking made,

* *Who Live in Unity*, by Laurence Whistler: Heinemann.

Mere thought with thought, like fingered bell with bell,
Blooming and waning, audible tenderness . . .

And the idea is difficult through its very simplicity; it is inexpressible except obliquely; it is something behind and hidden, only known when it is no longer there—"They who had heard no music heard it stop."

The poems are an attempt to resolve that double life in man, which Tolstoy so profoundly understood; to fuse into wholeness the inward with the outer daylight self, capable, on its level, of communication but never of communion, never of the act of love and faith whose wishes, "like joined hands, "lift up

To faint excited horns and triangles
One hour, or moment, like a cup of Joy
Itself, the revealed eye in everything.

This, like music, is an interchange beyond the level of language—

Only believe in touching, you will touch.
Touch—and the music will be there already,
As if, but far away, some door had opened.—

the door into that Earthly Paradise, glimpsed so often through the bars of our private prisons: no place *elsewhere*, but a country and a climate we can enter in the here and now.

The one-ness of thought and being is a music. It is also a sun, the light and warmth which is "active behind everything," which can become the burning-glass of ecstasy, or, "silently lavish, white and everywhere," the only positive all-accepting presence. Joy is "like sunlight learning a hill," because only in and under joy can come the gradual discovery of the shape and the pattern. And when the unity is broken and the ecstasy lost, it is the sinking of a sun—

And it was life grew cold
And grey, and slightly smaller than before.
And they lived on. And in between them and
Far off each numbly insulated act,
There was a pane of nothing.
And each felt nothing. And was shut in it.

Or it is the darkness of the thunderstorm, which is an ironic background to the quarrel.

The one-ness of joy is the sun, is the music sounding when the door in the mind is opened, is the cleanness and rhythm and simplicity of water, the unchanging in change, the unity in the manifold.

To know the tree the lightning cracks
That gives the bough to the swung axe
That piles the cart that feeds the flame
That wills its ashes to the same
Dark need of earth that yet must be
Used and delivered of a tree—
This is the house that God built.

To feel around the candle-stick
That holds the match that gives the wick
A listening-for-someone eye

That looks on nightmares quietly—
For all re-entries into night,
For meditation in sweet light,
This is the house.

To know the stream that fills the pool
That fills the jug that fills the bowl
That fills the cupped and thoughtful palms
With water gentle as an alms—
The house of the good life must be
Even so in all simplicity.
This is.

But unity is precarious, it is something glimpsed and wrestled for, something too often and too easily eclipsed if only by the momentary failure of faith. Always between living personalities stands the pane of nothing. All poetry is, in a sense, about the loneliness of the spirit, the estrangement, the flaming sword at the gate. Underneath is the unknown, the "dark floor where words are impotent," the unattainable mysterious world of another personality.

For she is danger. O she is the stranger.
Rather she is the foreigner, with all
The fascinating *difference*, all the charm
Of a strange country somewhere underfoot,
The marvellous antipodes of sex.

This complete insulation of the spirit, each shut in nothing, reaches a climax with the sixth poem in the sequence, the quarrel. The sun goes in, the panes are drowned, all the doors of the mind are slammed by the dwellers on the dark threshold. It is a picture of a familar world, the everyday world of the clenched and hostile faces, the shut world, wherein we have our ordinary and incurious being.

Life, we obscurely feel, *ought* to be lived under an arch of happiness. The world is immeasurably more than itself. It ought to be

Joy such as Adam woke to, Joy in this and that.
Joy in a cloud, a safety-pin, a chair.

But it isn't. Something which ought to go right has perversely gone wrong. Only a few years away from the cradle, the arch is a broken fragment over abysses. There is nothing to be done about it; a state is altered by being, not by doing. Somehow the present must find forgiveness for and reconciliation with the past; but today goes round and round like a crab in a bucket, prisoned in fear and remorse, tomorrow and yesterday. That blind inward circling cannot be altered except by an inward change: by awareness and gratitude, the acceptance and recognition. That is what these poems are about—how to find and to keep the knowledge of oneself as a part in a design, a note in a rhythm; how to bring meaning into chaos and unity to the self-divided.

Though how to thank for that which in itself
Includes your thankfulness? For the first gift
So all-embracing it's impossible
To see? How to accept immortal life
As if it were no more than painted egg
Adorned with an initial—to receive

Such manna into hands not satisfied
Or ignorant, but hungrily aware?
By symbols only. For the soul is only
Nourished in ghostly parallel to symbols.
Lucid as kneeling, meek as candle-light.
Take, eat.

All values come from the individual: as soon as they have been formalised into accepted traditions, they die, and must be re-stated, or we die too. We are dying now, in the midst of a surrealist chaos of inverted values. This sequence is a re-statement of something so simple and ancient and universal that it has become fossilised by familiarity, and so forgotten. Knowing in our heads the real meanings of simplicity and awareness and thanksgiving, we have allowed them to die out of our hearts into words. We have to begin again to learn

From nearness to the ancient elements
The sanctity of matter,

and we can only cure the sick heart or divided mind by symbols, by turning the knowledge of our unity with all things into feeling, the act of absolution, the new start

in that austere room
Where the stone smells of remote gratitude
All joy is lovely, and all else observed,
And nothing's private or beneath regard.

These poems are poems about the acceptance of life, and about love, the marvellous antipodes, the climate and the country under a new sun, which it is the pilgrim's business to go seeking. For only under love's awareness dwells that unity of spirit which can impose a shape and pattern on the irrelevant. We go *through* life. Things only happen. They appear and disappear, meaningless as driftwood on a stream that never finds the sea. They can make no sense at all, unless we can

view
All living as the work, and all the work
As artists do;
That is, with reverence, and a rich delight,

making with our minds everything holy, part of the sun and the air, the music and the water of an untravelled country.

At the close of these nine poems, all the interwoven threads of imagery make a coherent pattern: and because they are written against the background of eternity, they are not isolated fragments of experience but unified, organic, an integrity. And because the poems are more than they say, they

Follow music to the urn of silence
Into which music plunges, and glides on.

After the final note they change and grow in the memory, because the texture of them is a philosophy, an attitude to experience, which lives in and behind the words. The words are always alive, have dignity, have occasional moments of splendour—

Two candles only for the festival
Of all rekindled?
And one great window troubled with the dawn

As with too high an honour—

but what remains living in the memory is not so much a pattern of words as a pattern of thinking, the seed of a creative idea.

Time was still
Plodding with slow footfalls in the tower.
But for one moment there had been a glimpse
Of the design, the meaning. Gone. And yet
Not utterly—still floating luminous
Just behind matter, just beyond range of mind:
To fascinate the corner of the eye.
And remain with you always.

"*And remain with you always!*" The three stanzas of this final poem relate the whole sequence to the Holy Sacrament, the mystical focus of ancient ceremony and thanksgiving, of the yielding-up and the receiving. And the effect of this last echo from the loveliest incantation in the language is to express at once the striving for and the entrance into that inward peace and simplicity which has been the theme of the whole sequence, and its benediction. It reminds one that no poem about love is not also a poem about God.

God, unity, love: the giving and accepting—these make the pattern. "Days are complete lives." We are born into a Universe out of sleep, and nightly die. Tomorrow is the empty book, the blank canvas, and living a single day is the act of a creative and awakened spirit. That is what we must somehow learn to do—

To feel life as a fabric in the hands,
To hear it as a rhythm; and to know
The scrubbing of a table-top can prove
Descent from Michelangelo,

to feel, in fact, the difference between the thing and the thing-in-itself, between the known which is our commonplace, and the inscape of the known, which is where we belong, and what belongs to us. Unless experience is felt as a rhythm of which we ourselves are part, there is no meaning to it or to ourselves. We shall continue to live within ourselves behind our bars, eternally compensating for an unbearable present by making dreams out of a future, which will only itself become the unbearable present. We shall go on, as we go on now, round and round like a crab in a bucket. We shall go on living in the ends and denying the means, till time redeems itself. We shall grope blindly through the shifting fragments of an imbecile disintegrating world, among the marble torsos and ruined towers, caught, chained, trapped, neither able nor willing to catch that glimpse of the design.

For there *is* a design, there *is* a meaning. Every man is conscious of it when, for an instant, accidentally, he wakes: and beyond the opened door is the music. That also is what art does, even if sometimes it opens a door on to nightmare and shows us things in ourselves or our future we dare not face. And that is why poetry needs for its reading not only humility but courage. For at the heart of all true poetry lives a queer *disturbance*, making one's ordinary self suddenly insecure, suddenly conscious of the nothing, aware at the edge of one's mind that the solid earth is, through a tiny shift of focus, a shadow or mask or dream, and that everyday existence keeps shut a door we dare not open. These poems, like all real poems, mean what they *are*, some-

thing intranslatable on any other level; they can be experienced, not "explained"; for they are an entrance into a reality beyond the echo of Time's footfalls in the Tower, a glimpse of that design and meaning in ignorance or denial of which we go blind to our damnation.

RONALD FULLER.

By way of appendix, it is pertinent to admit that *Who Live in Unity* owes much to Rilke, but there are traces too of the influence of that other great and tragic German poet, Friedrich Hölderlin. Hölderlin too made the sun his symbol of harmony within the circle of Nature and love: in his "Diotima" he had found the vision of the world of order which he believed all men might enter. "We are nothing; what we seek is everything." Hölderlin's words might serve as an epigraph to Laurence Whistler's sequence.

J. B. Leishman has followed his well-known translations of Rilke with the *Selected Poems of Hölderlin* (Hogarth Press, 8s. 6d.). These translations show the same remarkable qualities as their precedessors. They have the rare merit of being able to stand on their own as accomplished lyrics. Meticulously faithful to their originals in words and rhythm, they never betray by any awkwardness the fact that they are second-hand. A brilliant introduction gives the main facts of Hölderlin's thwarted and unhappy life, and the perfectionist philosophy which sprang from his despair and passion. A more elaborate biography of the poet is Agnes Stansfield's *Hölderlin* (Manchester University Press, 5s.). This is a readable, simply-written book with detailed analyses of his poems, and forms a useful introduction for the general reader.

W. H. Auden's new book, *For the Time Being* (Faber and Faber, 8s. 6d.), is appropriately named. For the time being here is the familiar mixture of brilliance and cleverality, of poetry now complicated and profound, now self-conscious and insincere. For the time being, once again, whatever happens must be the last thing one expects; when it ought to be the handkerchief it is always the white rabbit that comes from the conjurer's hat. But only for the time being; for sooner or later an integrated Auden must emerge from this dichotomy.

His book is in two parts, *The Sea and the Mirror*, a postscript to the *Tempest*, and the title-poem, *A Christmas Oratorio*. *The Sea and the Mirror* is, of the two, the better poetry and the better Auden. Prospero, the old man at the end of his enchantments, "sailing alone, out over seventy thousand fathoms," addresses Ariel, his youth and magic, who will companion him no longer nor teach him "to sit still and give no orders"; the remainder of the cast soliloquise, each in his character, each one the divided mind seeking the integrity of the whole man, Antonio, who alone has

"Time to curl up at the centre
Time turns on when completely reconciled."

Out of the charmed circle at last, they seek the answer to their division, the entrance to the "green occluded pasture"; each is a lost thing looking for a lost name, Ariel and Caliban, the halves of an unresolved whole, the separate refusal or failure to become a Self. Beyond the deceiving mirror held to nature lie the desert and the sea.

The quest is the quest for

"The spring in the desert, the fruitful
Island in the sea,"

the whole world lost since childhood. Much the best thing in the poem is the magnificent song of the Master and Boatswain; much the worst the long address of Caliban to the audience. The thought it contains is wrapped in the wilfully perverse elaboration of a scarcely readable prose.

The title-poem attempts to treat an ancient theme with all the dazzling and bewildering paradoxes of modernity. Its failure is chiefly due to a profound doubt in the author's mind; "the Pilgrim's Way has led to the Abyss." Here the cleverness and unexpectedness become exhausting. In spite of some moving passages, most of the poetry in the Oratorio glitters with a surface brilliance, cold and lifeless.

The search for truth on a different level, the "losing the separate self, the seed of sorrow," is the theme running through Ruth Pitter's *The Bridge* (Cresset Press, 5s.), her most important book since *A Trophy of Arms*. "Poetry, like all passion, seeks for peace"; and through the subtle and exquisite rhythms of these sixty poems shines the serenity of a very remarkable mind. Most of the poems deal with subjects remote from the war, with the mystery behind birds and trees, and the "secret joy" in the soul of man. The exception is "The Cygnet," the longest and in some ways the most impressive poem in the book. The cygnet is the symbol of the betrayed and ravaged beauty of London; the tears of the destroyed Aphrodite become red and silver flares falling from the sky, but below, the secret seeds of the future are born in the mind of fear and "sown by fury in strange far meadows and small secret places." Nearly every poem is written with that classic lucidity and strength, that power of saying infinitely much in a phrase or an epithet, which has already made much of Ruth Pitter's work permanent. Whether she writes of the "netted cinnamon and umber" wings of the cuckoo or the "chestnut down and crapy wings" of the bat, or the tree "where the bright leaf shades the big plums flushed with fire," she shows the same controlled yet richly evocative power of writing. There have been few octosyllabics written for many years at once so flexible and so luminous as those in *Seaborn:*

"Yes, be sure that she shall lie
Your loud shores and beaches by;
With a sweet blind look shall come
To strike all the roaring dumb,
With a small and sleeping face
To spread stillness in that place
Where the enemies embrace."

The Outpost, by W. W. Gibson (Humphrey Milford, Oxford University Press, 5s.), is the last volume of the series begun by *The Alert*, and treats, like its predecessors, of the impact of war on the private lives of individual chemists, clerks, bakers, farmers, shepherds, all now stamped with the same grim seal. A recurrent motive throughout the book, and a motive which has been the inspiration of some of Mr. Gibson's finest work, is the dream of the remembered past falling suddenly across the unbear-

able present. This is a collection of snapshots, anecdotes, impressions, and is full of the swift ironic dispensations of death. Mr. Gibson's fertility of invention and technical competence are remarkable, but in these many verses only very rarely is one reminded of the creative intensity of his prime.

Sylvia Lynd's Muse is sweet and simple, treating familiar themes in familiar rhythms, never falling much below nor rising much above a serene lyrical competence. Her *Collected Poems* (Macmillan, 6s.) contain few astonishments, but are full of a cool, quiet charm, as if they had all been composed in a garden on a sunny afternoon.

> "A gilded clock upon a tower
> Above the sunlight-coloured walls—
> Gently as a petal falls
> Falls the cadence of the hour."

Gentle as petals the cadence of these verses, always pleasant to read, rarely as tender or memorable as *To Sheila Playing Haydn*, that favourite but still unstaled anthology-piece.

A man who can write such supple musical prose that it reaches moments of high poetic intensity, and such loose-knit verse that it is at times jogging laboriously on the level of prose is something of an enigma. Charles Williams' latest volume in the Taliessin series, *The Region of the Summer Stars* (Poetry, London, 6s.), is written in five-stress lines which recall the alexandrines of the *Testament of Beauty*, and recall also the garrulity of that sometimes beautiful but on the whole rather tedious masterpiece. The theme of the Holy Grail and the Matter of Britain is so ancient and mysterious and Mr. Williams' treatment of it so subtle and so rich in allusive symbolism that it needs all the reader's alertness to follow his meaning. The form of the poem is not redeemed from monotony by its chiming echoes and internal rhymes and assonances, nor from the charge of obscurity by passages of profound insight and imagination. *R. F.*

The Delectable Mountains

PARNASSUS is a cruel peak to climb,
And every poet knows it to his sorrow;
But eldritch piping lures him all the time,
And weary hope dreams of success to-morrow.
Its woods are dank and tentacled with creepers,
Old toads ooze slime and little snakes spit venom;
The fragrant groves distil drugged death for sleepers,
And offer noonday thirst a shrivelled lemon.
The lower slopes have most inclement weather,
Their flinty rocks tear pilgrim feet to tatters—
All coupons spent on substitutes for leather,
But struggling on, to him, is all that matters;
For, if his heart like Keats's is not broken,
His book may be a popular gift token. *G. S. Oddy.*

Poets and Pretenders

IN all sorts of ways men are becoming too clever, and by an excessive respect for the intellect are losing touch with that part of themselves which has immortality, the soul. We are all opportunists of one sort or another, and we are adept in a multitude of ways. A continually intenser competitive existence drives us on to performancè as though we have a new but unreasoning sense of time—that it must be filled with achievement. What is the hurry? Life is short it is true, but quanitity has not yet displaced quality, in the Old World at any rate, and in the World of Poetry there is no place for that itch for performance which drives the Economic World along its dubious road. Yet too many poems to-day are the result of a sort of private enterprise rather than the fruit of an inspired control. So far as our experience is a guide nearly every man or woman who has the skill to versify and a gift for words is busy; but what motivates them? Is it the desire for publicity, to exhibit a technical skill or mastery to an admiring world or is it a compulsion from deep within to be delivered of an inspiration? There is, alas, only one answer, and the unusually large number of privately printed books and booklets which has reached us is proof that this egotistical spirit is not to be damped even by a realisation that publishers are or might be uninterested in them. Is it not well known that these are mercantile gentlemen with a strictly financial view of Art, and where is the point of writing at all if one is not to thrust one's offspring out into the world by one's own unaided effort?

We do not share this view of publishers. Indeed it is our opinion that they still have sufficient confidence in the poetic judgment of a sufficient number of their fellow-citizens to attempt to cater effectively for it; and therefore we believe it to be a sound rule to abstain from private publication of verse if no commercial sponsor can be found for it. The oft rejected masterpiece is still sure of its immortality, the light cannot be hid under a bushel. We have seen no verses anyhow which, emanating from the unknown, would cause any publisher chagrin as at a lost chance.

But this is not all our woe. There is still a publisher's market for the versifier who has not found time in a hurrying world to await the tardy and infrequent flash of inspiration. What a pity that is. One imagines these would-be poets as so busy writing verse that inspiration is unable to get through or make itself heard amid their mental preoccupations. But what a good rule it is to wait. If the waiting is long don't worry, your craft does not need constant practice. Versification is like riding a bicycle, one never forgets how, once the secret is mastered.

So if, in this survey, we confine ourselves to those books which have passed a rubicon in the shape of some disinterested reader whose interest was properly commercial we shall be understood to have preferred this method of discouragement to a more articulate and possibly more wounding course. The decision may seem less shocking if one reflects that in a mercenary world everything must have a financial equivalent.

One of the most difficult forms of poetic utterance is the Sonnet, not only by reason of its arbitrary conventions and its limited space but, more than these things, because it must smoulder and glow with an intensity which increases as the thing unfolds, to burst into flame at its end. The necessity for that compression of sense and deftness with words which results in the fine line is so exigent that the sonneteer must be a

master of his craft and, on this lower level, it is possible we suppose for the adept to write sonnets which will stand up to any technical criticism, as often as a suitable idea presents itself. But the sonnet demands more than the completest technical mastery can furnish, and that is why, among a world's myriad sonnets, there are few first-raters and fewer great ones. Moreover, there is something about this form which does not easily invite the reader, so that unless it excites him he is apt to deny it even that excellence which good craftsmanship confers. We were reminded of these convictions once again in reading a sequence of fifty-two sonnets which comprises the larger half of *The Golden Chain*, by Cyril Harrey (Stockwell). One looks almost in vain for technical blemishes, they are so rare even in so copious a selection, but, alas, the Promethean fire is absent too in almost equal measure, and we are left with an accomplishment which moves our admiration but not our emotion, and with a feeling that we have been regaled by a subtle and adept mind prolific of fine and even striking lines, but not by that deeper well of the spirit which alone can refresh our own and give us that passion of conviction which is the sum of poetry. It is to the point to inquire whether, in fact, it is possible to achieve so much as Mr. Harrey has sought to do. The sonnet can only be an occasional flowering in a hidden garden, not an herbaceous border, however beautifully cultivated.

The second half of the book is filled with poems topical, personal, nostalgic, which form a record of the author's moods and beliefs and reflect a personality which is concerned normally with the emotions natural to men; but not often does he forget the mundane for the imaginative realm which he enters in "Moonlight":

> "I am afraid
> Of the Moon, and her haunting white temptation
> I am afraid of the dark places where the trees gather
> Whispering sinister things
> ★ ★ ★
> The grasses stand, as though dead,
> Pretending, waiting
> Till this visitation be over."

The word "Poems," used as a title for a book of verse, is all too often an indication of contents which will accord well with the simplicity of the single word, but which will provide little else to justify the resounding appellation. So it was with *Poems* by Myfanwy Haycock (Western Mail, 2s. 6d.), and in saying this we do not decry simplicity saving as it is manifested in a certain superficiality of emotion, quite distinct from simplicity of method, which is the only method we know of conveying intelligibly the depths of emotional and spiritual percipience. Miss Haycock has sentiment and feeling and is entirely free from that dark and dubious preoccupation with words which we moderns so sedulously encourage. We observed not one self-conscious phrase, significant of misplaced mental agility, anywhere and, upon its own modest plane, the book is deserving of encouragement.

Midland Poems, the title of the next book by Edgar Billingham (Cornish, 2s. 6d.), is a variation on its predecessor in this series, and not only because of the topographical qualification. We do not believe that many of these pieces are poems either, although

for a very different reason. There is, for instance, surely no attempt at poetry in things like this:

"There was a small group and the magnificent
figure of the R.S.M. patting the helpless, curly head.
The quick burst of laughter.
'Ah, lad, if your mother could only see you now!'
It was about ten o'clock I remember."

But let us be fair. In "To a Dead Poet" he says:

"Rest; nor heed the marching
Nor bugle's biting sound,
For it's we now up and doing
And you that's underground."

and concludes

"Now ours pain, beer and beauty,
For you—ah, never to see
Again the green spring thrusting
From Bredon up to Clee."

And so, comfortably demonstrates a power which we perhaps regard more highly than he does. Yet even where there seems to be no concern with poetry there is no flatness nor, anywhere, that conscious verbal effort which asks for applause. Here is no phrase-maker but a man who speaks what is in his mind with no more consciousness than pertains to a conscientious exercise of a natural desire for expression.

The Holocaust, by Gwendolen Sherrard (British Authors Press, 3s. 6d.), is a book full of somewhat unrelated pieces which vary so much in mood and theme that we wonder once again at the choice of title. Written during this expiring holocaust its contents are unequal both in accomplishment and in inspiration. There are several sonnets on war subjects, and these have that competence which is needful but none of that fire which belongs to sonnets and holocausts alike. These expire, they do not incandesce into that last burst of flame which is the sonnet's crown; and this is the temper of the whole book, versification without noticeable quality save a craftsmanship which has put some good, sound music within the authoress's grasp. The themes she has chosen, where they accord with her strong title, have not we think been sufficiently realised in her emotional deeps to have that appeal which makes them satisfying.

The sonnet seems to be experiencing a small revival, if we can judge by its prevalence in recent publications, and we welcome this for the evidence it would seem to provide of a healthy return to the rigours of classical forms. The next book, *Sonnets in D Minor*, by G. S. Oddy (Stockwell), is further confirmation of this impression, and if we are unable to express unqualified satisfaction with his performance we still approve of the attempt. The writing of sonnets is so excellent a technical exercise that its practice can have nothing but a good result upon the writer's skill and the effort to achieve perfection in rhyme in so spare a framework will undoubtedly deepen and strengthen his poetic powers if he refuses to compromise with his difficulties. Nothing is achieved in this world without stress and devoted labour,

and those poets by natural right (or mere intention) who refuse the long apprenticeship and offer the world their amorphous and assertive stridencies in the name of modernity are achieving not a new thing but the hoariest of hoaxes. But to return to Mr. Oddy—he, like so many, is still in labour to the technical achievement, not to the point of failure, but as though the rigours of composition had excluded the participation of anything but his intellect. Poetry cannot be thought out, it is the expression of truth arising from the unconscious and carried into the mind upon a surge of emotion; and the Sonneteer must be so habituated to his chosen form that his inspiration moulds itself therein without effort. Only thus will the tension and the passion amount, line by line, to the final orgasm. Herein lies the often unrealised, difficulty of the sonnet; it is a difficulty which, if it has to be consciously overcome will rob the poet of success.

Miss Nina Hosali who has, on occasion, contributed to this journal like Mr. Oddy and Mr. Harrey, has sent us her book *Children of Allah*, which has been praised by some whose opinions we respect on a matter such as this. These have some validity indeed if applied to some only of the poems presented, but there are too many which aim at mere description or are concerned only with her humane reactions to the brutalities of life in North Africa, to warrant an indiscriminate approval. Simplicity and tenderness of treatment, while good, are not in themselves enough to move the emotions of others; it is only when this treatment is applied to the expression of the profundities of spiritual reaction that our withers are wrung and our souls stirred. Miss Hosali does not do this in her concern for suffering beasts, but she does succeed in such poems as "Moon at Nefta":

"The oasis paths are gleaming silver
And on their immaculate surface
The palm-leaves trace designs in deepest black.
In the absolute silence
The moon speaks with her own voice,
Her voice which is only heard in the time of her fullness;
A sound as of far-off rushing waters,
Or like wind in the leaves of the trees."

Who has not heard this inaudible noise of the full-moon's shining and wished to express it in words?

It seemed at first that some remarks about the sonnet made at the beginning of this article might need revision in the light of *In Strictest Measure*, by Albert Edward Johansson (Bruce Humphries, $1.50), which we have received from Boston, Mass., for here is a volume of sixty sonnets, some Shakespearean and some Petrarchan, in which many were a-fire in varying measure with inspiration. Still we do not recant although we are shaken. The task which the author sets himself is too great in so short a time, but we confess that the average quality is high, and this in spite of some technical blemish which may be discovered here and there. If the "measure" is not always of the "strictest" this after all is the lesser matter though still, in the sonnet, important. On the vital matter of emotional content, not all by any means are as good as "Vanquished":

"He mastered all things but his wild soul lay
A captive Norman in a castle keep,
Rebellious, proud, and waiting for the day
When with wild vengeance it could sunwards leap.
All things he tried he mastered, but his hand
Was strained to cracking when he bound his soul,
And then it writhed in the flesh's band
And bore down crashing all the built-up whole.
He seemed to master, but it all was false;
He failed to conquer what he first should rule,
And in the cadence of his throbbing pulse
Lay that which turned to fire what once was cool:
The things he made went down to dust when he
Fell to himself, his long-fought enemy."

No. 3 of *Outposts* with contributions by Raymond Tong, Robin Atthill, Pamela Davies, William Hutcheson, Ida Procter, and many others is sufficiently catholic to perform quite ably its professed aim of providing an open platform for contemporary and significant verse. We found it very interesting, not only for this reason but for the clean, vigorous quality of its contents, and if some of it has the appeal of literary merit only we can honestly aver that the merit is good merit and its impact pleasant. We hope, however, that modern trends will not persevere too studiously along austere paths. The poet must feel before he thinks and more than he thinks, not after and less.

A volume from Godfrey Locker Lampson is always a promise of good refreshing verse of a polish and technical refinement which is an achievement in itself, and *Mellow Notes* (Frederick Muller, 5s.) is no disappointment. The author's gift is a light-hearted one, not necessarily humorous, but happy. The world for him is a sufficiently attractive place which is meant to be lived in unrebelliously and with grace, and is certainly not one to inspire a reforming zeal or a despairful quest for the profundities of what is called Truth. He remains upon the bright surface of things but makes it the brighter for his wit and dexterity.

And yet how simply the imagination of the reader may be invoked by the imaginative interpretation of ordinary, even superficial, things, so that one is plunged almost unaware, beneath the surface; and the bare words become the speech of a new and profounder world. The following quotation is actually the first five lines of *Take Off at Dusk*, by Flt.-Lt. Peter Roberts (Frederick Muller, 5s.):

"The air is very still
Without a murmur steals away the light,
A cloak of shadows draws about the hill,
And trees upon the border of the field
Retreat before the coming of the night."

That this particular poem peters out, after its first stanza into mere descriptive prose in rhyme is matter for regret, and the poem would be better, we think, without its main body. However, it is proper to remember that the author (only in his early

twenties) was in an alien environment in the R.A.F. if this book is any criterion. And this is not in the least to decry his achievement as an airman. That he was navigator of a Halifax bomber, shot down in the attack upon *Tirpitz* and *Prince Eugen* is sufficient testimony to his competence and spirit in dangerous enterprises. But it is in his feeling for and understanding of nature that we see the real man, and when he returns from captivity as a prisoner of war we may hope to have more of this tender feeling for the moods and beauties of what is often wrongly called the material universe. Let us quote the first verse of one of his poems "Exile's Evening":

"Now, when the breeze is stilled, and twilight drains
The amber liquid light from the last tree;
Now as the sun turns westward, so turn we,
Westward along his shafts across the sea."

It is nature that moves him to poetry not the excitements of war or the emotions of human relationships.

A book of quite another quality is *You and Your Ships*, by B. Montague Scott (Hutchinson, 5s.), a full half of which is occupied by the title poem. Perhaps, therefore, the volume should be judged upon this, its major opus, and if so we are glad to record our pleasure in its philosophical tenderness and warmth of feeling. The poem is in rhymed couplets, and if there is not a perfect mastery of this difficult form the technical shortcomings are not too numerous to mar the poem for the reader. The effort of technical accomplishment has its usual reward in the abundance of good lines, some almost with the epigrammatic flavour of Pope, and we are once more confirmed in our belief that only the poet who keeps his nose to the classical grindstone will realise his full potentialities; and he alone will sometimes surpass them.

The *Labyrinth*, by Nathaniel Micklem (Oxford University Press, 4s.), is of another quality, yet full of classical erudition, literary skill and philosophic cerebration. The Spenserian mode of versification is excellently used and therein lies for us the only justification for calling this a poem. The author's arguments, we believe, would have been better presented unadorned with classical allusion and in a less difficult medium than verse.

The Millstream, by Ralph Lawrence (Macmillan, 5s.), is a mixture of very various ingredients, some poetry, much verse and quite a bit of prose. We will begin with a piece of the last, the opening lines of "The Wind,"

"Quitting the pleasant house and turning a corner
I came face to face with winter.
The encounter was not unexpected;
Nevertheless it took my breath away."

There are better (or more poetic) lines in this poem, but what could really survive such a start. As for the author's verse (that which rhymes and scans), this is competent though marred at times by such slipshoddinesses as

"But now that morning's been conceived anew,
Daybreak's immaculate in deepest blue;"

The apostrophe "s" for "has" or "is" is not even allowed in prose and is an abomination in any form of writing.

Poetry, however, is present for the true ear and, in such moments, Mr. Lawrence's diction takes on a proper correctitude, a dignity, which is we think essential for true poetic expression.

"Eyes of evening, evening clear,
Follow not war's corrosive wake;
But ponder by this moss-lipped weir
And watch purled water, pearly-gray,
And weirside willow-trees that shake
In winds which fan the failing day."

There is more of this short poem "October," although alas, with another of his lazy abbreviations, but nevertheless very quotable if we had space for it; and there are other exquisite pieces like it; but it is plain that the author has not always waited for the emotional impulse, from which inspiration is born, before committing himself to paper.

Technical perfection, gifts of a literary sort, a vivid imaginative power, all these can and do produce poetry and verse which charms the reader and sometimes even leads the more daring critics to proclaim a new immortal. But in the making of a poet these things are but the scaffolding or, perhaps, the materials of which the edifice is composed. The architectural conception is another matter, and therein, not in the beauty of the bricks, lies the aura of immortality. Before us is a book called *Poems*, by Harry Brown (Secker and Warburg, 6s.), a young American private soldier now in England, which has all these technical and mental qualities, amounting to virtuosity; and for its author is claimed this further and crowning attribute of permanence. We confess at once to a deep impression, but one of the hardest things, for the mortal, is to recognise the immortal, until death and the passing of succeeding generations have demonstrated a plain fact. We prefer to record a lively admiration but to reserve judgment upon the greater issue, not because we are timorous, but because that is the prerogative of our grandchildren. One reflection upon this theme does, however, occur to us with sufficient force to make us disregard our contemporary myopia, and that is that not with his occasional modernist pieces will the permanence, which is born of memorability and simplicity, be achieved. But Mr. Brown is, in the main, a traditionalist, and in these already immortal forms he sounds a note of power which may easily echo and re-echo long after his voice is mute. A poem called "1939" has some stanzas which certainly resound:

"Soon the continents will groan
For a harvesting of bone
And the bottoms of the seas
Swell with loss of argosies.

Death's great starving gut will gorge
On the smith beside his forge.
The farmer's body in the grain
Will never gather wheat again."

But the author, in this book of selected poems, regales us with many moods. We were especially pleased with the fanciful poem called "Voices on the River":

"It was a sweet murmuration of pretty ladies
Came to him as he rode upon the waters.
It was as though their voices and lily laughter
Came from Queen's light-foot maids and King's bright daughters.

And his poor boat was a barge burnished with silver,
And he himself a prince with a jewelled sword,
Reclining on tapestries, full of commendable fancies
As to which of the delicate rout would call him Lord.

Surely they all were dressed in Doric draperies
That zephyrs moulded to their innocent thighs;
And truly, too, each held a snow-white pigeon
That said coo softly, and looked with large dove's eyes."

The romanticism of youth out for a row in a skiff could scarcely receive a better handling, and if the (unquoted) end seemed a little anti-climatic, as an unnecessary under-scoring, that is to be forgiven in any young poet, even one of genius.

Mr. Padraig O'Horan has a new volume, *The Bright Winged Piper* (Fortune Press, 6s.), just published, and in it he still further pursues his tuneful and carefree wanderings upon the easier slopes of Parnassus. We still miss the almost anguished note of Excelsior. Mr. O'Horan lingers just above the valleys, within sight of the nestling hamlets upon which he loves to look down while his thoughts drift here and there as fancy wills.

Modern Scots poets are not so sure of our Southron welcome as Robbie Burns, especially when they come heralded as such, in books like *Night Flight*, by Edward Boyd (Scoop Books, 1s. 6d.). Are these two words "modern" and "poet" mutually destructive? There is, of course, no reason why they should be unless modernity has to consist in flat journalism. Here is Mr. Boyd's picture of a London Tube Station in a Blitz:

"Faces and faces; shadowed and shadowless,
Unified by expression, infinitely recurring,
decimally repetitive;
stolidity and suffering,
cattle sheltering from a shower of steel."

But Mr. Boyd is not always so intent upon words nor so anxious to parade them. In his love poems he touches profounder things with beauty, if with the modern candour startlingly exemplified in this title "Song Before Conception":

"And yet I know that you will never die,
That, by the fusion of our bodies, we ensure
The only immortality,
I the sower, you the fruitful field;"

But perhaps this candour is not modern; the song of Solomon might have inspired it, and we wonder if we were not misled by this description of a poet whose imagination and emotional power merit no more circumscribing description than human. He has poetry in him, but in his aversion from established poetic forms he will hardly realise that gift in full measure. He is trying to grow flowers in a desert.

Miss Teresa Hooley in *The Singing Heart* (Frederick Muller, 6s.) offers a collection of rather ephemeral verse which has no particular pretension to importance, but which is tuneful enough and exhibits a finished technique in all sorts of forms and

modern formlessnesses. A volume of light verse, excellent for those with a taste for such things.

Forty Poems, by William Box (Chester and Lang, 4s. 6d.), might almost have been called Forty Thieves, for they stole our attention with a suave dexterity which made the experience a positive pleasure. Many of these forty have a lyrical note which when authentic, as this is, provides the most hypnotic charm of poetry. Let us quote a short piece called "Wisdom":

"Wisdom, though your years can teach
All that Folly would forget,
And striving find you out of reach,
For all your dull importance, yet,
You cannot watch smooth rivers run—
Nor plunge in them as I have done.

Learning, with your furrowed brow
Through every day of every week,
Your labour has not taught you how
To kiss the night-wind on the cheek,
Or frolic the warm, rippled sands,
Or take the springtime in both hands.

Knowledge, you're an empty glass
Drained by midnight of your aloes,
And since you are condemned to pass
Your time with spectacles and tallows,
So shall the rainbow be my goal,
And moon-mist take me by the soul."

There is a sensitive, meditative quality in Mr. Box's work which is familiar and dear from an inherited love for the riches of our native poetry. We welcome his reinforcement for our constant warfare against that modern defeatism which must seek new forms, new methods, and new expressions for unaltered and unalterable truths.

Ever since Pope observed that the proper study of mankind is man and proceeded to indulge in philosophical argument in verse, there has persisted a belief that poetry might be enlisted for a direct attack upon social evils. We do not hold this view. If poetry has any reforming function it must be by the deepening of man's spiritual perception over the whole field of human experience; by a simple intensification of his love and appreciation of beauty. This can never be done by the intensive cerebration of sociological verse. There is no short cut to the spiritual salvation of man nor to the reform of the life which his shortcomings compel him to lead, and, because of this, books like *Challenge to Faith*, by Cliffe Richmond (Macdonald, 5s.), must necessarily fail both as poetry and as argument. The work, in seven books and more than 3,000 lines in unrhymed pentameters, is upon its own plane vigorous and well phrased, and gives evidence of considerable thought and an enlightened mind. As a poem it lacks the primary quality of inspiration without which it could never prevail over the scepticism of the unconverted. Cleverness, even to the height of a *tour de*

force, is not enough; certainly not in the realm of poetry whatever it may rate in the field of social philosophy.

"Wherever dawn paints grey the east, there man contrives a union
With the Eternal, praising him with hushed and reverent breath;
But we, above an angry earth, make quiet, grave communion
Before the face of death."

So sings John Wright in *Airman Singing* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 4s. 6d.), and here is propaganda of the right sort since it has that emotional appeal against war which is so much more persuasive than the intellectual, which can always be countered by argument. There is a varied assortment of mood and method in this book and here and there a mingling of the careless and the tragic which is very moving. The last two verses of "Stag Party" illustrate this well:

"Four young bachelors
Sitting with their beers
Each loved a woman—
At least so one hears.

It didn't make much difference.
Only one got wed.
Three lie for ever
In a single bed."

An air-gunner in the R.A.F. has a right to be heard and to be as gay or as grave as he may please. When, as here, the work is so terse of syllable, so brief with wit, we owe thanks on two counts and offer them heartily.

The infinity of combination into which a not unlimited vocabulary may be woven, to say nothing of the limitless variability of its human users, is a sufficient refutation of those weaker brethren who despair of saying a new thing in the old way. Mr. T. Lovatt Williams in *Noonday* (Wilding) is not depressed by the copiousness of the immortals and light-heartedly steps out along the well-worn paths with some simple and tuneful songs of the country-side. Nothing very important comes from his muse, but who wants to be important if one can be happy. Listen to "Lark's Song,"

"A skylark, from the sodden ground,
Soared up one day in early Spring,
When earth was dismal and distraught
And no one had the heart to sing.

The lark sang all the notes he knew
And used when life was gay and glad,
No people heard him in this place
Save one for whom the times were bad.

'Well, well,' he said, 'if one small bird
Can sing on such a wretched day,
I'll show them what a man can do.'
And so went whistling on his way."

A good gift is a light heart and infectious, and Mr. Williams is kept eternally contented by the sights, sounds and scents of the English country, and contents us in turn with his lyrical responses to them.

What impulse dictates the employment of forms and metres? It has always been our opinion that these should not be consciously chosen but selected unconsciously under the influence of the subject which is to be celebrated in verse. There is an

instinct which, if left alone, will unerringly select the rhythm fittest for the theme, and that is why we have always felt a little dismayed by those industrious souls who spend so much time upon the minute dissection of the metres employed by others, babbling of spondee and trochee, and tracing in each delicate nuance of stress the cold calculation of meticulous arrangement. We cannot believe in any such heresy, for poetry is an uprising of emotion and as such must be inhibited from too conscious an intellectual preoccupation with the mode of expression. Indeed when this seems to have been carefully fabricated it comes between us and the message, producing an estrangement between author and reader. *The Leaves are Scattered*, by S. J. Dowham (British Authors Press, 3s. 6d.), has some examples of this art which fails to conceal itself.

"While another man recalls
Waterfalls
Or daffodils blowing;
His heart turns to a flame with longing
For thronging
Wet streets with glowing
Lamps. Or his thoughts wander still
A high hill . . .

This is, but faintly, poetry and as verse there is not very much to be said for it. The book indeed is one of those vigorous, modern productions whose chief characteristic is a show of virility which, since the author is a Canadian soldier on Active Service is not so surprising. But this pioneering vigour is not always or enough concerned to force its strong current into the ordered channels of poetic expression and, as a result, we are buffeted by an impacting stream of strong but trite enough matter much of it in a colonial vernacular which lacks, however, the tang of novelty.

But there was novelty in the next volume, the novelty of complete sincerity and self-forgetfulness. which not even in the case of a young widow inspired by the untimely death of her husband, a naval officer, can often have been allied with so sure a mastery and so noble a touch. *Sheet Anchor*, by Eve Stuart (Sidgwick and Jackson, 5s.), is such a book, whose too few pages are given to one long poem and three short ones only. But these are enough to demonstrate the high quality of their achievement, if not to satisfy our desire; and they record a love which in this interpretation is a most moving experience:

". . . . death's disruptive hand
Cannot blot out these pictures in the sand
This is for ever,"

is finely said in the first short poem, but Mrs. Stuart has painted even more permanent pictures with her words. The first stanza of the long poem "To Michael, Dying," needs quotation both as a fine beginning and as showing the lofty but unpretentious mood of the whole:

"Mortal affection, that on Earth is given
As dear allegiance as man's heart can render,
Wan viceroy to the sovereign love of Heaven
Yet still the true reflection of its splendour,

Your noble diapason sound again:
Ring out, immortal tune! Till sorrow see
The stringent alchemy of love and pain
Compound her solace and antiphony,
And other lovers find
The undeterred, unfrustrate spirit of mankind."

But there are some 450 lines to this extreme unction of human love, full of understanding and courage, passionate and unsentimental and wasting no ink upon a personal tragedy, but seeing it as an epitome of the waste of the best through the greeds and follies of mankind:

". . . . Spent he lies
Whose courage could not swerve
Whose greed was love, whose only avarice to serve."

This is one of those books where one may quote from any page, and one moreover where it seems an impertinence to praise the inspired grace and technical perfection of what is so manifestly an unhindered pouring forth of the spirit. But this is our task and we would make this observation about such achievement. Its power of healing is greatest for the heart from which it sprang, but its sincerity has wings which know no bounds.

The War Poems of Nordahl Grieg, translated from the Norwegian by G. M. Gathorne-Hardy (Hodder and Stoughton, 6s.), is a collection of patriotic poems which may serve as no unworthy monument to a poet who lost his life in a flight over Berlin. But war does not seem to have inspired him to the full measure of the genius which was in him if we are to judge by the quotation, on the dust cover, of a short poem which seems to have lent its name as a sub-title for the volume before us. This poem is not included in the book itself, probably (but inadequately) because it was written many years before this war began, but we will quote it in tribute to a brave man:

"Nought have I given, but prove me,
All that is mine demand;
Youth and its fire—come, claim them,
Hallow them thine, my land!
Thus be my loving tribute
Not in dead words expressed,
But take my life as a garment
Cloaking thy naked breast."

The work of translation seems to be competent and these simple and sincere pieces read well enough in this alien tongue. The almost inevitable loss which they have suffered, that loss of native music which an alien note can so seldom supply, has not, however, subdued or weakened the sincerity of patriotism which is their inspiration.

Quite another sort of war poetry is contained in *To the City*, by C. P. Billot (Fortune Press, 5s.). Sincerity in the modern manner, a sincerity which is neither humble nor simple, but in revolt, is its keynote. Mr. Billot is a modern and his techniques are what one would expect although there are examples of more mannered

methods in his book. But we found the book unmoving as if little had been written from first intention and by inspiration. The studied violence of such things as

"The mist slides up And cold knives bite
The river moans Through senile bones,"

can never come anywhere near achievement whatever particular effect is aimed at. The quotation, from a piece called "The Old Men," is typical of the whole and typical of nothing else. We do not understand the inspissated gloom which seems to darken so much of this book. Nobody pretends that this is the best of all possible worlds although God's in His Heaven, but there are still daffodils in spring and the sun still shines occasionally. But perhaps the trouble is not so much gloom as an intensity which results in a warping of vision and a clouded perception. Let us quote the beginning of "Open-Air Meeting,"

"This is the greatness
and these the people,
crawling naked under the swollen roots,
they have sucked their substance
and have become like threads, hollow
as gnawing of rats behind a painted skirting."

None too clear perhaps but bitter, by God.

A volume of *Selected Poems and Epigrams* from the works of G. Rostrevor Hamilton (Heinemann, 7s. 6d.) is an event which arouses in us a lively interest. Mainly traditional, although there are examples of freer forms, this is the sort of poetry which this Society lives to foster, as indeed it must, for one of its primary aims is the promotion of verse speaking, and this is just the sort of poetry which can be spoken or memorised; poetry with the light of inspiration flickering through its music, and alive with a wit and a poised vigour which capture the reader effortlessly. Many of the poems in this book are familiar, and all should be, since they are all taken from books previously published, and taken with a nice discrimination and a self-judgment which is implicit in the unpretentious beauty of Mr. Hamilton's work.

The second half of the book is devoted to a reprinting of Epigrams, Satire and War Verse, but it is for the epigrams that we are most glad. This form of classic wit, barbed but urbane, is a rare treat. Its rarity being an indication of the ruder manners of this day or of a lesser talent. We cannot resist quoting one here. If brevity is wit, this is it: "To Mr. Enoch Arnold Bennett."

"Great Arnold, was it right of you
(Great Bennett, thank you for that nod!)
To drop the Enoch, since he too,
The Scriptures tell us, walked with God?"

Mr. Hamilton is revealed herein as a man of the world with wide interests and a challenging skill in the presentation of his beliefs and opinions. Where he is affronted he can be sharply satirical. In defending an older morality he gibes

"And he who by self-discipline preserves
His soul without a spot may spoil his nerves."

Which, as a dig at a modern sexual philosophy, takes some beating.

* * *

There should be a wide welcome for Mr. Alfred Noyes' new book *Shadows on the Down and Other Poems* (Hutchinson, 8s. 6d.), for much too little of his work has appeared in this country during the war years. The new volume is a miscellaneous one and shows the poet's wide range of thought, subject and technique. One section which will come as a surprise to many of his admirers, is a group of child poems very much recalling the work of A. A. Milne in metrical skill, speed and lightness of touch. "At the Zoo" is an excellent example with its wholly delightful opening stanza.

"Look at that *heavenly* pig," said Mena.
Nanny uplifted a scornful nose.
"That's no pig! it's a Laughing Hyena!"
"Gracious! why does he laugh d'you suppose?
"Something tickles him!"
"*Tickles* him?"—"Tickles him!"
"*What* is it tickles him?"—"Goodness knows."

It is interesting to find so staunch an adherent of the classical forms of English verse, experimenting with *vers libre*—often very successfully—as e.g. in the following lines from Ragnarok:

"Unknowing the white cloud
Drifts thro' the sky;
The wild flower opens
And drinks the sun.
We who see, we who know,
We who love, we who grieve,
Pass. The blind rocks
And the dumb earth endure."

Elsewhere the poet shows all his old mastery of established forms and all his old power of drawing new significance from them. The ease and charm of such lines as the following disguise a great skill and great knowledge:

"Beautiful England, under a white-sailed cloud, lies dappled with shadow,
Swings into sunlight and drifts into amethyst shadow anew."

Worthy to rank with the finest and most serious of Noyes' work are the lines "The Admiral of the Fleet," in memory of Admiral Jellicoe. How excellent and sincere is this picture:

"The alert, slight form;
The weather-wise face that showed no ageing sign,
But only grew in kindness year by year;
The shrewd brown twinkling eyes; the gentle heart;
The resolute truth in judgment and in act;
And those quenched lips no enemy could unlock
To answer what the grave could answer best."

Equally fine is the poem "In Memory of Rudyard Kipling" (Westminster Abbey, 23rd January), which is another experiment in modern rhythm:

"On the day when they buried him there—
To one coming up from the south, from the broken cliffs
Where his Roman soldier, in Vectis, long ago
Plucked winter violets out of the spray-wet turf,
And the Greek Girl, catching her robe up with one hand,
Ran down the path of the sea (at his magical word
Recalled into life from the breathless exquisite urn),

It seemed that his own lost world went streaming by,
But it was the window that travelled. His world remained.
A white gull over a ploughland; an old house
With lichen-encrusted roofs of Horsham stone;
Farm horses with labouring shoulders, drawing an elm;
A sliced rick grey in the sun; a whale-backed down,
They were his; and they all remembered."

The most ambitious poem in the volume is perhaps the least successful. This is a blank verse satire of some twenty pages entitled "If Judgment Comes," and containing an exposé and a denunciation of Hitlerism. Mr. Noyes' style has not the incisiveness nor his mind the acerbity to carry off such an attempt, and there are too many pedestrian lines in the poem which lacks speed and intensity, though it contains several effective passages. We hope that the reception of this book will tempt Mr. Noyes to some work which will draw forth his full powers—something of the scale and importance of his "Torchbearers."

We are sorry to say it, but *To-day's New Poets* (Resurgam Books, 4s. 6d.) is not an exhilarating book, and as it purports to be representative of the best work of the younger poets of the day this is what it should be. Its format is shabby, its typography depressing and unimaginative and containing not a few errors. True, there are many restrictions and difficulties to-day, but there are, too, many beautiful poetry books published in spite of all this. We look to the day when every book of poems worth publishing will be designed and produced with all the loving care, skill, and imagination that the publisher can call upon; when the typography, paper, cover and lay-out will be a matter of the most careful forethought so that the finished product will be wholly satisfying and in some measure prepare the reader for the fine flowerings of the human mind which it contains. And when will some publishers rise to the fact that poetry is not like so much butchers' meat to be cut up in slabs and slapped on the sheet, two or three poems to a page. We appeal for the principle of one page to a poem—be it only four lines long—so that its dignity, its contour, and its essence may be savoured without distraction—so that it may be approached with full reverence and courtesy. And we should like to see it made an indictable offence for any book to be published without the date, or at least year, of publication. *To-day's New Poets* —what day?

The reader of new poetry will find many familiar names here—Alex Comfort, Peter Baker, Clifford Dyment, Robert Herring, Christmas Humphreys, Henry Treece, Anne Ridler, Emmanuel Litvinoff and, of course, Nicholas Moore. But by what means the selection has been made we do not know. We should not like to think the poems are truly representative of the best work of these writers. Out of the eighty-five poems printed, Henry Treece has two worth-while poems; and Alex Comfort, Francis Gelder, Christmas Humphreys, Noel Matthews, Norman Nicholson, Sylvia Read and Anne Ridler one apiece. But we confess that the format of the book jaundiced our approach to its contents.

Poetry for You (Blackwell, 4s. 6d.) is C. Day Lewis's attempt to arouse in the young the enjoyment of poetry. As he rightly says, "poetry is first and foremost something

to be enjoyed," . . . and don't let anyone tell you anything else. For those who insist on asking what is the use of poetry he has many answers, but as he insists all through the book that poetry is, in writing and in appreciation, a matter of the emotions his principal answer is that it provides an outlet for the emotions and an opportunity for their proper cultivation. Granted that "it sharpens our senses, makes us more keenly and fully aware of life, exercises our imagination and stores up treasure in our memory," but is it true to say that "the meaning of a poem reaches you through the emotional effect the poem has on you"? Granted again that in the last forty years only one of all the manifold types of poetry, "to communicate the poet's private experience," has been generally exercised, yet is this limited use of poetry confined to emotional experience? May not the poet attempt to convey through the medium of verse his own intellectual discoveries or, as he might claim, his spiritual as distinct from his sensuous-emotional experience? But all this is a matter for argument, whereas none would deny that this is an excellent book for "children of all ages." The writer's analysis of the ingredients of poetry, chapter by chapter, is refreshingly original. He begins with simile, metaphor and images, and points out that whereas these are necessary to distinguish poetry from mere verse-making, metre, rhyme and assonance, which he lumps together as forms of repetition, are by no means essential ornaments. As he truly says, the line from "In Time of Pestilence," by Thomas Nashe, "Brightness falls from the air," is exquisite in itself by virtue of its imagery, and a poem composed of such lovely images would need neither rhyme nor metre. Most interesting, too, but far too brief is the chapter on "How a Poem is made." Here no poet can be more than personal, but at least we learn a little of the author's own poetic processes. For him a poem is created in three stages. First, the seed or germ of the poem strikes his imagination. He jots it down or makes a mental note of it, and then forgets it. Secondly, the poem takes gradual shape in the unconscious, till the moment comes when it is ready to be born, a period ranging from a few days to several years. "Stage three is where the poem bangs at the door, so to speak, and demands to be let out." It is in the birth pangs that craftsmanship takes over from inspiration, and Mr. Lewis rightly stresses the need of genuine hard work. This is a simple, friendly volume, without conceit or pedantry, and should be of considerable use not only to the boys and girls for whom it was primarily written, but to all the rest of us as well.

"A Sign of the Phoenix"

ELIZABETH MYERS, the author of the delightful novel *A Well Full of Leaves*, whose latest novel *The Basilisk of St. James's* has been published since she wrote this note, which but for printing delays and consequent congestion should have appeared earlier, writes: The theme of Sherborne School Prize Poem last year was "Home." It was an unusually provoking snare for Euterpe in view of the heightened meaning which war has given to that unit of civilisation, the home, and speculation ranged widely as to how the middle-teens poets would respond: that long-extended question—does the adolescent *think*—came into its own with a vengeance.

The prize-winning poem was submitted by J. A. C. Ardagh, who was fifteen when

he wrote his verse. In its entirety the poem is too long to be published under present paper rationing, but the first seven stanzas and four later ones printed below are sufficient evidence not only that this boy does think, but that he knows *how* to think.

A refreshing feature about Ardagh's lines is his unashamed enthusiasm, a quality extremely absent from much of the poetry written between the two world wars. The chief function of many poets writing during the last twenty years has been iconoclasm solemnly embarked upon without, however, the aptitude or the vision to raise something new in place of what they had razed to the ground.

It has been considered *de trop* to show the least gleam of optimism. A poet was a frump and a rank outsider who dared to enjoy himself. The emphasis has been on reason, vacancy, sophistication, negation, and irritations puffed out to tragedies and devil take anyone who spoke from the heart. A great deal of poetry has been written and, unfortunately, is still being written by those who have no notion of their responsibility either to art or to life, who have never heard, let alone believe, that poetry "is the impassioned cry of the heart in the presence of the wonder of life." A break with tradition has been considered an essential and so, left to wallow in their own puny and arid evaluations, unhelped by the nobility and grandeur of the poetry of the past whose essence is ever new and ever present, these clever upstarts have produced stuff which undeniably gets published and which will as certainly perish.

But it is a very encouraging sign that a fifteen-years-old poet is not ashamed to make a stand for a romantic approach to life and poetry. Stanzas five and six of Ardagh's poem in their sturdy declaration for the near and the ordinary, in the generosity of the boy's tribute to the magic of the humble familiar things of every day, are some heartening indication that a lost vitality may be returning among that generation in whose hands lies the future of civilisation.

Without suffering there can be neither great poetry nor great lives. We can only hope that the universal anguish of the last five years has made the world-soul so responsive to the eternal truths that something in the very air will give rise to "noble thoughts that pass across the heart like great white birds."

It is far too optimistic to think that all will be so galvanised, but some of the youngest poets, at least, have made an avowal of relative values, and seem to be returning to the fundamentals of life. And as we look to the new world ahead we may not be over-hopeful in concluding that the ruins of our one-time existence are justified, since without fire and ashes there cannot be an ascent of the phoenix.

When our sun has set
Behind the silent mountains, purple and dim in the west,
And death has darkened life's little day—what then?
How will the future lie in the land of the blest?
Will the past be a blank? Will a new life start again?
—Man cannot say.

Yet I am sure
That memory will not fade as a withering leaf,
Over there . . . and die as an autumn rose.
We will remember—we will return, I believe,
To the past as spirits, and silently seek our repose
In childhood's years.

How would it be
If I came again when the grave has given me rest,
If I came again to the past that I know as to-day,
A poor pale withered ghost, an uninvited guest
With eyes that have lost their shine and hair that is sad and grey,
A wistful shade?

This would I see:
A red brick house with creepers adorning the south;
Three sloping lawns and a garden bright with roses,
Bright with the flowers of June, and the warm earth's mouth,
Agape for the cloud-sent wine, while the landscape dozes,
And the sun shines.

Deep rooted here
There grows contentment, a marvellous fullness of life,
The love of simple things; here would I find
What never can die—the best that earth can give;
An eternity of love where souls are kind,
And hearts are true.

But there is more,
For just as a man who has lost his memory
Begins to recall the little things, suddenly bare
To the mind—trivial fragments; the sight of a tree,
The bark of a dog, or the smell of perfumed hair—
Such would I seek.

Dream-moments
Happily spent, but taken for granted now:
The beech by the gate with its glory of April green,
Home-thoughts of beauty, sledge-marks in the snow,
Breakfast at nine—all these that at fifteen
Seem life's romance.

* * *

Beauty I love,
And above all the beauty of the soul,
The secret beauty of love, and the love that springs
From a mother's bosom, love full-blooded and whole,
Tender-hearted and pure,—the love that brings
Sweet happiness.

But love is more than this,
For Life cannot be found in a dream that is mother and milk;
I love the sunlight, girls and the laughter of friends;
I love the world, young hearts, and the rustle of silk,
Bright colours, bright eyes, and the dream that we hope never ends.
On with the dance!

I desire Life:
I seek to grasp its brightness, unquenchable burning,
The fire of Love that is fanned by a ravishing wind.
And yet, at the back, there is always an infinite yearning
For something that's missing, something I never will find,
Something that's lost.

* * *

But give me peace,
And a home where the great sea breakers vainly roar
And the rush of the wind is far—oh! far away,
Where I may love and be loved, and for ever sure
That here I may find, when the skies are blowing grey,
Content and calm.

J. A. C. Ardagh

A COMPETITION TO REVIVE INTEREST IN POETIC DRAMA

The Poetry Society offers a premium of £50 for an unpublished poetic drama in one act. The theme and form of the play is left entirely open. A prose form of the highest literary and poetic standards such as, for instance, "Riders to the Sea," by J. M. Synge, would be considered equally with rhymed or blank verse. The entries will be judged by a small committee of the Poetry Society and the final choice be made by an independent authority.

All entries must be typewritten and bear the name and address of the author, accompanied by a stamped addressed envelope, and should be addressed to "Poetic Drama Competition, the *Poetry Review*, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1, before October 1, 1945. The winning play may be published in part or whole in the *Poetry Review* and will receive special consideration for separate publication and may be produced by or under the auspices of the Poetry Society: other publishing or performing rights will be shared with the author.

£10 FOR POEMS OF PLACE

THE POETRY REVIEW is provided with another premium by Mrs. A. Dorothy Holmes, a Shropshire member of The Poetry Society whose *Storm Wrack* and *Cotswolds Calling* have gone round the world in aid of desirable causes. She offers £10 annually in competition for poems of place.

The theme affords ample scope, its only limitation being that a definite place must be dealt with. A ramble over the countryside would not be eligible although a view from Snowdon or Skiddaw would be permissible and even a county might be celebrated. Less than a hundred lines should suffice and songs and lyrics rather than factual narrative poems are preferred. All entries for the 1945 competition must be typewritten and bear the name and address of the author, accompanied by a stamped adressed envelope—a 1d. stamp will suffice, and must be addressed to "The Holmes Prize, THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," not later than July 1st. The judges may divide the prize money into three parts—a first award of £5, and two of £2 10s. All entries shall remain at the disposal of the adjudicators until the award is published, and the winning poems and any other specially mentioned entries may be published in THE POETRY REVIEW.

Dynamics of American Poetry: CXVI

In *To the Leaders of the Allied Nations* Edna St. Vincent Millay has given us a treatise on the war. It is very strong and much of it has often passed through my mind. I may say it is *not* poetry—in my understanding of poetry. To put it simply, she desires to know—why this war? Quoting from the closing stanza:

"This is not capital and alas . . . .
We are many millions strong."

As the time moves forward it is more and more difficult for many Americans to see our reason for being in it. There are voices on many sides now suggesting this fact. Read it and agree or disagree with it, but read it!

In the Surgeon's Hands by Ida Norton Munson (Bruce Humphries, Inc.) the Sonnet that titles reads:

His face? I know not whether it be fair,
Or lined and grayed to mark the slipping years.
His eyes? I do not glimpse the pity there,
Or try to probe their depths for hopes and fears,
Only upon his wondrous hands I gaze,
And search my memory through so fittingly
To voice their loveliness. In still amaze
I bow before their quiet dignity.

They make the crooked straight and heal old sores;
The blind to see, the war-torn clean and whole.
Throughout the suffering world they touch the doors
That open wide to life. The bitter bowl
Of pain they sweeten till the weary rest,
As though the hand of Christ has served and blessed.

A sense of drama is found in "The Maple's Challenge":

Beneath its glowing leaves I saw her stand:
A little woman—drab and bent and old.
I saw her shade her eyes with wrinkled hand,
And look up to the tree's bright red and gold,
With shining face, in which one glimpsed the dreams
Of beauty, love, and all the wondrous things
Time takes—just as the gallant maple gleams
And to the winter gay defiance flings.

Its brave tints touched her hair, her garments frayed,
The while she stooped for sticks to make a fire;
Then slowly walked, with aged feet that tire,
Along a path the steps of years had made.
And yet it seemed, as to her home she turned,
Her spirit tarried where the maple burned.

Margaret Ridgely Partridge is a poet who has truly sought and earnestly found solace in religion. In *The Pilgrim Pavement and Other Poems* her titled poem was greatly honoured by the Deans and Chapter of Westminster Abbey, Canterbury, Exeter and Liverpool Cathedrals, where it is sung at seasons of pilgrimage. It was inspired by the

dedication of The Pilgrim Pavement at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York, March 11th. It is lengthy, so we may give only a small portion; first the opening lines:

Can you hear far down the future,
Echoes of a moving throng
Treading down the Pilgrim Pavement
In procession, millions strong?
Can you see their rapt expression
Do you hear the choral beat
Of their pilgrim song and psalter
Can you mark their sandalled feet . . . .

and:

On your stones have saints and sinners,
Kings and paupers travelling met,
Only here may men as brothers
Rank and age and race forget.

Steadfast faith is expressed in "There Is No Fear"

I have come back—let it be known
By each and all at the curtain's fall
I have faced death as all men must—alone.

Let it be known there is but peace
As you glimpse the shore of the Evermore,
As you near the land of the Great Release.

Let it be known there is no fear
As the spirit slips with smiling lips
Into beautiful calm when death draws near.

A tranquil light from the far-away,
An outward drifting on tides uplifting,
And Love enfolding you all the way.

This is the message I would bear—
Be the crossing deep as the wells of sleep,
There is no fear when death is there.

Allen Tate, born in Clarke County, Ky., 1899, critic and poet, has an enviable position in the literary world. He received his B.A. degree, Vanderbilt 1922; married Caroline Gordon, novelist, 1924; free lance writer since '24; fellow Guggenheim Foundation, '28–30; lecturer on English Literature Southwestern (Memphis), '34–'36; lecturer English Women's College, U. of N.C., '38–39. He became the incumbent of the chair of poetry, Library of Congress, '43–44; was awarded the Midland Author's prize (Chicago), 1933, was honorary president of The Mark Twain Society. He has to his credit some fifteen volumes, many concerning American historical characters.

Recently Mr. Tate has sent us for review a slender book of poetry, *The Winter Sea*, dedicated to the memory of John Peale Bishop. The poems are too long to give in full and, to me, obscure. For this reason we will give only the first verse of "Winter Mask—To the Memory of W. B. Yeats":

Towards nightfall when the wind
Tries the eaves and casements
(A winter wind of the mind
Long gathering its will)
I lay the mind's contents
Bare, as upon a table,
And ask, in a time of war,
Whether there is still
To a mind frivolously dull
Anything worth living for.

The Whole World Over—War verses by Isabel Anderson (Bruce Humphries, Inc.), carries the reader far and wide: Norway, Russia, Italy, France, the Desert, Hindu Chants, etc. Much attention has been drawn to "Kwan-Yin" (Chinese Goddess of Mercy) which follows:

Abandoned near the giant pines,
A Goddess stands of bronze gray-green,
Whose gracious hands make tender signs,
Inscrutable, mute, unseen.

About her rise the dusky trees:
Beneath her lies the ivory sand;
And no sound save the restless seas
Echoes in that vast land.

Her eyes of mercy shed scarlet tears
For souls of mankind long since fled,
And still a multitude marches on
To join the vanished dead.

But tears of blood she weeps in vain;
They fall about her broken feet,
Where woodland vines shed them again
In crimson berries sweet.

Typical of the agonies of the prison she writes, "War Prisoner":

So weak
I can barely move my aching feet
Or speak.
Nothing but slops, a handful of rice
To eat
That not even the rats can secrete.
Trembling to work I crawl,
Dig ditches, empty filth and waste
In sick distate.
Watching, the grinning keepers sprawl.
I stumble; then they turn and break
Across my face the bamboo rod.
Down I fall,
Darkness before my eyes.
Delirious I dream. I rise
Into the far unknown.

In the extravagant praise Marianne Moore receives, the mind is intrigued to know what manner of writing is this. Her last book, *Nevertheless* (The Macmillan Com-

pany, New York), is but fourteen pages. In the *New York Times* recently W. H. Auden expatiated on what he believes to be the extraordinary genius of Miss Moore. We quote: "Miss Moore's poems form part of the body of durable poetry written in our time"; further, "The organisation of subject matter, the prosody, the cool manner, neither whimsical nor romantically poignant, are utterly unlike any poetry." Proving this point we will read: "The Mind is an Enchanting Thing"

is an enchanted thing
    like the glaze on a
katydid-wing
        subdivided by sun
        till the nettings are legion.
Like Gieseking playing Scarlatti;

like the apteryx-awl
    as a beak, or the
kiwi's rain-shawl
        of haired feathers, the mind
        feeling its way as though blind,
walks along with its eyes on the ground.

It has memory's ear
    that can hear without
having to hear.
        Like the gyroscope's fall,
        truly unequivocal
because trued by regnant certainty,

it is a power of
    strong enchantment. It
is like the dove—
        neck animated by
        sun; it is memory's eye;
it's conscientious inconsistency.

It tears off the veil; tears
    the temptation, the
mist the heart wears.
        from its eyes,—if the heart
        has a face; it takes apart
dejection. It's fire in the dove-neck's

iridescence; on the
    inconsistencies
of Scarlatti.
        Unconfusion submits
        its confusion to proof; it's
not a Herod's oath that cannot change.

A native of Ohio Mrs. Lena Mearle Shull attended Antioch and Earlham Colleges and the University of Kentucky. After becoming a graduate nurse she entered quite

a wide field of usefulness and through her acquaintance with Jane Adams assumed charge of the University of Chicago Settlement House Kindergarten, and married Dr. Charles A. Shull. It seems to one in reading of this active and useful life that a woman with a gift of poetry might say much that would be of value. Let us examine *Rainbow Through the Webb* (Banner Press, Georgia). The titles suggest the well-worn road of the poet,—Hail to the Dawn, Wild Roses, Lilacs, The Great Blue, Tender Silence of the Stars, Love Call, etc., etc. Let us see what this poet has to say about Elizabeth Barrett Browning,—

Pain was the footstool at her feet
From which she climbed to reach the heights
Where, from her lofty pedestal,
She visioned those celestial lights.

The glorious garment that she wore
Was marvellous, and deftly sewn
With seams of singing melodies
Full-fashioned by her hand alone.

What compensation for her pain!
Her power of song was bread and meat!
And treasures from her banquet board
Were shared so all the world could eat!

And the Great God Pan piped sweet and clear
Such "blinding sweet" she alone could hear!

A third book, *Strangers on the Stairs*, reaches us from Louise Crenshaw Ray (Kaleidograph Press, Texas). *Color of Steel*, issued in 1932 by University of North Carolina Press, and *Secret Shoes* from the Dial Press in 1939 preceded this. Mrs. Ray's short stories, essays and poems have appeared in many magazines. All of the poems in this collection have appeared in print in periodicals and many of them have received awards in poetry contests, and writers of standing have spoken in praise of her. We will give her first sonnet, "Sailor's Wife":

The wind is roaring like a frenzied thing
Tonight. It harries window pane and door
With dripping fingers, bent on entering
My cabin, weathered as the sandy shore.
My heart is torn by hope and agony,
Remembering another storm which tossed
The trees like this, a sailor on the sea,
His crew and vessel given up as lost.

Again the steps upon the walk. Oh ears,
Beware! Too many times you have believed
The wind. Outside the window pane appears
A face, a vision which the storm retrieved.
The storm hath taken and the storm gives back,
Creates a heaven of a fishing shack.

It would seem that Mrs. Ray has not travelled out of her South very much. There is no touch of foreign lands in any of her poems. She does tell us:

A grandfather from Monaghan
Who loved the things of earth,
Left me a happy legacy
A sense of mirth.

Elizabeth Browne writes us in the preface to *Tryst With Life* (The Torch Press) "that poetry would rekindle in every heart a strange new torrential fire, the knowledge of which will bring new strength with which to gird. . . . We would write of the essence of things which cannot be denied. . . . To write . . . to lift some lonely soul from deepest, darkest night, and surround him with an everlasting halo of Hope so bright." "Mysteries" follows:

The light of day silently takes its departure
The outlook becomes shifting, and deeply shaded.
We see the far flung banners of the setting Sun
And while beholding, gradually, they have faded.
The velvet curtain of dusk is gently lowered
And one by one, stars appear like silver stairs;
To the East, the West, the North, the South,
A vivid display of sublime beauty flares.
This magnificent, elemental, nightly vision
Was here, long ancient, before all human birth.
Thus calmly we accept this Olympian grandeur
As cryptic mysteries applied to Mother Earth.

Miss Browne gives us a poem on "Peace"; the last line seems a strange denial of what man is about at this writing:

An unceasing struggle this mortal life
Just carrying on to the tune of strife.
Into whirlpools, we are often whirled
Yet wings of high vision are never furled.
Man's pent up powers are given for use,
So with confusion, he will make no truce;
Seek no crown of laurel, no unjust praise,
Fighting, he prays for Peace throughout his days.

Dick Roberts tells us in *Spring Comes in Many Ways* (Bruce Humphries): "Most of the poems were written in my Montana cabin—many were written while I travelled in Hawaii, California, Mexico and the Southern States." He goes the free line road in his 140 pages. One finds scarcely a rhyme. Of course there is the sort of rhyme that goes with free verse. "Traveller at Home" follows:

There isn't much to this room.
This house,
This street,
This town,
These people,
But I love them
Because they're what I'll remember someday.

There was a ride downtown,
A loose brick in the steps,

A cracked window,
A strange tourist in a big car,
Men fixing telephone wires,
Mrs. Prindle,
Mr. Lane,
Brown place in the lawn,
Bill's porch.

Not much,
But the things I'll come back to.

"Pity the Late Knowers" is another good example of Mr. Roberts' way of writing:

Leave something of them, Time,
The people who live to die.
The lost people
Who trust too long to fate,
The ones who *know* too late.

Leave, at least,
Their footprints
On the earth where they were beaten.
Let them have a crumb of the cake
They might have eaten.

There are many long expressions of Mr. Roberts' experiences, but I choose the short ones for editorial purposes. We will end this with "Values":

If I were paid,
The day I die,
For what my life
Was worth,
I would get
A cup of blood,
A bell,
And a box of earth.

If I were to pay
This thing called God
For the life
That had been mine,
I would give
A stone,
A moan,
And the winter smell of pine.

From time to time there walk across the stage of life personages who are perennially interesting and poetically romantic. John Keats was such a personage. Successively through the years eminent writers have dedicated time and attention, publishers have invested capital, libraries have made room on their crowded shelves, and the reading public has welcomed an additional volume on this gifted poet who died over a century ago.

Our Amy Lowell spent the last years of her life and thousands of dollars assembling the material for the two volumes on John Keats, published in 1925. An additional volume on Keats will be welcomed in *Forever Young* (Putnams), by Dr. Blanche Colton Williams, until recently Professor of English and head of the Department of English at Hunter College, New York City. The 350 pages of this volume are dedicated largely to the last three years of Keats' life. Among the precious shrines I visited when in Rome was the Keats House. Very real seemed the presence of Keats and his friend Shelley. On another beautiful Roman day I journeyed to Keats' grave in the Protestant cemetery. The flowers were bright about the spot which marks

Keats' resting-place. He who seemed to us always eternally young appeared to me to be at my side, far from dead!

The poetry of Katharine Welles Wheeler has found its way to many magazines. *Filled Flagons* (Wings Press) is her first volume of collected poems. There are many short stanzas; one, entitled "Retrospection," is very much to the point:

Out of the pattern of the day
I salvage this one thought
Nothing . . . nothing is given away
Everything is bought.

In *Selected Poems*, 1923–1943 (Harcourt Brace & Co.), Robert Penn Warren, a Kentucky poet, fills some 100 pages with vivid lines. The poems are too long to give in their entirety at this time in the world's history, but we may tell you they show a remarkable variety of emotion and range of effects and through them he has won prize after prize; among them the Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship Award, 1936; Levinson Prize for Poetry; A Magazine of Verse, 1936; Caroline Sinkler Prize from Poetry Society of South Carolina, 1936–37–38; Guggenheim Fellowship in Writing, 1939–40; Shelley Prize for Poetry, 1942, etc.

Robert Francis was born in 1901 in Upland, Pa. He attended Harvard and received his Master of Education degree two years later. Mr. Francis is reported to have been taught in Beirut, Syria, and in Amherst, Mass., where he has lived since 1926. Before the war he divided his time between writing and violin teaching. The past two years he has been in succession a soldier, a farmer and a teacher of English. In his good-looking book of 70-odd pages, *The Sound I Listen For* (Macmillan Company), we find the usual list of subjects dealt with—"Seagulls," "Nothing is Far," "Spicebush and Witch Hazel," "The Old of the Moon in August," "Evening Ride," "If We had Known," etc., etc. I quote the "Old of the Moon in August":

"The old of the moon in August," the old man said,
"Is the time to cut your brush. You cut it then
You won't be having to cut it off again."

I judge he meant the dead that month stay dead.
I must remember—August, the August moon,
The old of the moon, the old of the moon. Amen.

Tell me, readers, do you feel as I do about this? How is it possible that a man who has had the advantages of Robert Francis can be satisfied to write this?

A new publication house for poetry has sprung up in the midst of these dark days—the Exposition Press in New York City—with an output as extensive as your Fortune Press. But none of the fourteen volumes received are sufficiently distinctive to mention here.

Wystan Hugh Auden, English poet, now a Professor of English literature at Swarthmore University, has just been awarded the $1,000 poetry prize of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He receives this tribute as an award for the beauty of his poetry, the unusually pungent satirical style, and his variety of poetic forms. Mr. Auden, who is 39 years old, recently married Erica Mann, daughter of the German refugee author, Thomas Mann.

March 30, 1945. ALICE HUNT BARTLETT.

News from Moscow

POETS AND POETRY IN WAR-TIME RUSSIA

The Crimea in Russian Literature

FROM times of old the Crimea has inspired Russian writers and poets. What Italy and Greece were to Western Europe, the Crimea was to Russia. The Crimea, which became a part of Russia in 1783, is a land of fabulously beautiful natural scenery, a land that bears within its soil the remains of Hellenic civilisation, the land of Iphigenia, Orestes and Mithridates. And, to come back to more modern days, the Crimea is associated with the names of such Russian literary geniuses as Alexander Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, Anton Chekhov and Maxim Gorky.

Pushkin came to the Crimea after being exiled from St. Petersburg by the Tsar for his poems in defence of freedom. He lived in Gurzuf, on the southern coast of the Crimea, with the family of General Rayevsky, a hero of the War of 1812. Gurzuf has its origin in an ancient Byzantine settlement that grew up around a fortress erected by Justinian in the sixth century A.D.

The Rayevsky family made their home in the residence of Vorontsov, Governor-General of Odessa and a well-known Anglophile. This mansion remained standing until the Nazi invasion. Since the establishment of the Soviet State it had been a museum dedicated to Pushkin. The house where the poet lived is located in a lovely park on the sea shore. Near it were the huge plane tree and the slender cypress in whose shade the poet rested and wrote.

Pushkin described his first impressions of these lovely spots in many poems. Gurzuf is the subject of two of his poems and also figures in the concluding part of "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai." In a letter recalling his stay in Gurzuf, Pushkin thus describes his favourite cypress: "When I happened to wake at night, I always used to listen to the sound of the surf, sometimes for hours at a time. There was a cypress growing just a few steps from the house; I used to go there every morning and soon had a feeling of real friendship for it."

Kerch is also associated with Pushkin's sojourn in the Crimea. In Kerch the poet visited the tomb of Mithridates, the Georgievsky Convent which legend links with the Temple of Artemis, Bakhchisarai with the Khan's palace and its famous fountain of tears. Pushkin wrote a poem about the Georgievsky Convent situated on the top of a high cliff overhanging the sea. The capital of the Crimean Khanate forms background for the poem "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai," the heroine of which is a beautiful young captive girl languishing in the Khan's harem. Pushkin also wrote two other poems about the fountain at Bakhchisarai.

One of Pushkin's contemporaries—the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz—also visited the Crimea, and sang its praises in a cycle of poems. He described the Baidari Valley, the Akkerman steppes, Bakhchisarai with the grave of Marie Potocki whose sad fate was told by Pushkin in his poem "The Fountain of Bakhchisarai." Mickiewicz also wrote about Alushta—on the shore of the Black Sea, about Chatyr-dahg—one of the mountains in the Crimea, and Pushkin's favourite peak—Ayu-dahg.

As is well known, these two poets had the greatest esteem for each other. Together they dreamed of the time when "nations will forget strife and unite into one great family."

The Crimea also in the twentieth century continued to attract the finest poets:

Valery Bryusov, Ivan Bunin and particularly Maximilian Voloshin were enchanted by its beauty. An interest in all things connected with antiquity was characteristic of the Russian symbolists. Poets of this school were attracted to everything in their country that recalled ancient Greece. On one side the Bay of Koktebel is bound by volcanic Karatag—a foreboding, ridged hill, on the other side—by the smooth lines of rose-tinited hills. The beach is strewn with pebbles of all hues—green, rose and orange. The orange stones are cornelians.

The poet Maximilian Voloshin built a summer home here in Koktebel that became a centre of Russian art during the Symbolist period. Poets, painters, musicians and scientists were frequent guests of the hospitable Voloshin. With a band around his golden hair, Maximilian Voloshin resembled a Greek poet with his classic tunic, his leonine head and his flowing beard. A man of broad education, Voloshin made a deep study of this part of the country and immortalised it in his poems. During the poet's lifetime, his summer home in Koktebel had become a veritable museum of rare books, painting, and statuary. After his death, his home was officially converted into a museum by the Soviet Government.

But Russian poets were not the only ones who found inspiration in the Crimea. Many great prose writers also drank from this fountain. As a young officer who saw action in the defence of Sevastopol, Leo Tolstoy felt the charm of the Crimea. His early writings dedicated to this Russian Ilium, are permeated not only with the heroics of defence but with the very atmosphere of this lovely southern city. In later years, Tolstoy lived in the picturesque castle of Gaspra, the property of Countess Panina, between Yalta and Alupka.

In his remarkable essay on the author of *War and Peace* Maxim Gorky recalled his meeting with Tolstoy at Gaspra. Gorky's reminiscences contain the following episode: "I once saw him as perhaps no one has ever seen him; I was on my way to visit him at Gaspra when I caught sight of a small, angular figure in a wrinkled grey suit and crumpled hat, seated on the beach. He was sitting on the stones gazing out to sea, his face between his hands and the silvery hairs of his beard streaming between his fingers. The greenish surf crept up to his feet, as though desirous of imparting some secret to this venerable sage. Every now and then the clouds would cast their shadows over the stones on the beach and the figure of the old man would now be thrown into light, now into shadow. The boulders were enormous, their cracked surfaces covered with seaweed from the heavy storm the day before. And the figure there on the beach seemed to me almost like an ancient boulder that had been given life, that knows all the beginnings and the ends, that ponders when and what will be the end of boulders and of grass on this earth, of the waters of the sea, of man and of the whole world—from stone to sun. And the sea is part of his soul and everything all around is of the sea and from the sea."

Chekhov, who also visited Tolstoy in Gaspra, had a home in Yalta, where he wrote his play *The Three Sisters*. The Soviet Government converted Chekhov's home into a museum, the director of which was Chekhov's sister Maria Chekhova. Thousands of visitors came here every year. Chekhov's home weathered the earthquake of 1927 without suffering any damage. It also lived through the Nazi invasion in the present war.

Conference of Frontline Writers

The Political Department of one of the fronts recently held a conference of writers and poets working for Red Army newspapers. The young writer Sergei Borzenko, Hero of the Soviet Union, made a report on "Soviet Literature in Wartime." This was followed by a report on "Ukrainian Writers at the Front" by the poet Andrey Malyshko, and on "The Ukraine, Its Culture and Its Indestructible Friendship with the Russian People" by the poet Lubomir Dmiterko.

Folk Tales by Marfa Kryukova

Marfa Kryukova, well known narrator of folk tales, has composed many new tales about the exploits of the Red Army in the present war against the German invaders. Keeping to the old melodic, bylina form she has created stirring epic poems about our great forbears, about the glorious heroic traditions of the Russian people. Marfa Kryukova is working very intensively and the tempo and scope of her activities may be judged by the fact that twenty-one of her poems were published in various Soviet newspapers and magazines in 1943. She has recently completed a large poem entitled "The Return of Ilya Muromets." In it Kryukova has developed one of her favourite motifs—the return of the knights of old in our day when "the evil foe" the "vile German," attacked our native land. It is a long narrative poem, in several parts. The author has found new tones and hues to characterise her favourite knights. Ilya Muromets with his trusted legion squares accounts with the hated enemy—with the evil serpent for the blood and tears, for the ravaged earth, for the burned houses, for the widows and orphans.

The 75th Anniversary of the Birth of Suleiman Stalsky

In an old Oriental book it says: "Great is the poet who glorified a great country but no less great is the poet who proved able to glorify his own small land." The mountain peasant Suleiman who composed verses in the little-known Kyuri dialect of the Lezghinian language, achieved the greatness of a national poet and his sage, resonant words carried over high mountains and have become mighty and multilingual.

Here is a subject that will always attract the attention of critics, artists and philosophers—what took place in the soul of this mountain dweller from a remote aoul; how did he, an illiterate tiller of the earth, become a famous poet, the "Homer of the twentieth century," as Gorky called him?

He was no longer a heedless youth but a forty-year-old man, the father of a large family, when he first took the saz (a national musical instrument) into his hands to compose his first song. The composition of this first song was preceded by years of roaming through mountain villages populated by various tribes, years of exhausting labour on the plantations in Gandzha, on the construction site of a bridge across the Syr-Darya, in the locomotive shops at Samarkand and in the Baku oilfields.

Like all his neighbours in his native mountain village, Suleiman worked in his garden and in the fields but still he was different from the usual mountain dweller. He had seen the world, he had been in the Trans-caucasus and in Central Asia, he could speak fluent Turcic, he understood Persian and knew the wonderful poetry of Iran and Azerbaijan.

From Russian workers in Baku he learned the story of Lermontov's "Demon"

and Pushkin's "The Prisoner of the Caucasus." Hafiz, Nizami, Saadi, Dzhami, Alisher Navoi, Lermontov, Pushkin—to him they all seemed wonderful contemporaries, his teachers and mentors. He was charmed by the beauty of Oriental poetry, the exquisite quatrains and rubaiyat, often with homonymic rhymes. And his first song was composed on a traditional oriental theme—about a nightingale. But not the carefree nightingale of Iranian lyrics, weeping over a rose. This nightingale is a humble bard —it is Suleiman himself.

Halt! Whither bound? Drop your fears
Think on how you lived.
Perhaps you knew the pangs of hunger?
You are silent . . . meek nightingale?

The themes of the bard's songs grew larger and larger in scope. After paying just due to the "Seventeen Aouls of Kyuri," telling of the sins and virtues of his neighbours and relatives, Suleiman soon ceased to be a local, Kyuri bard and became the spokesman of the thoughts and yearnings of all the Caucasian mountain dwellers. He scourged the unjust judges, the grasping mullahs, the Black-Hundreders who rode rough-shod over the mountain villages, the officials who despised the native customs, the swindling plutocrats.

It was after the establishment of the Soviet Government that the talent of the folk bard of the mountain country began really to flourish. Besides his large poem "Daghestan," he composed "Duma about the Mother Country," "A Poem about Sergo Ordjonikidze," and a whole series of superb poems. Suleiman's last poem, composed before his death in 1937, was dedicated to the voters who elected him to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R.

The whole life of this Daghestan bard was devoted to literary labour for the sake of that aim which he clearly indicated in his poem dedicated to the memory of his teacher—Gorky

"To be worthy of awards
That gleam on our breast
We have built a beautiful garden
Of living and great poetry."

Georgian Literary Evenings in Moscow

A series of ten Georgian Literary Evenings was held in Moscow recently. The arrival of Georgian poets and writers in the capital, their meetings with outstanding Russian writers and artists and with Red Army men and officers were a vivid demonstration of the unity of all fraternal literatures, now intent on only one thing—to help the mother country win a speedy and conclusive victory over the Nazi invaders.

The Georgian poet Simon Chikovani, Chairman of the Georgian Union of Soviet Writers, said:

"This is the first time we have met our Russian friends since the war began. We have come here to report to the people of the capital, to tell them how our writers are participating in the war against the German invaders.

"Firm ties of love and friendship have linked Russian and Georgian writers for many years. Many personal and official contacts in Moscow and Tbilisi before the war bore out the strength of these ties.

"We see that the poems written by Georgian poets in the years of stern trials are awakening a vital response in the hearts of the Russian people. The Russian poets have done a tremendous amount of work in translating into Russian and thus making them available to the Russian public. The leading Russian poets have joined in this work and we wish to express our heartfelt gratitude for their efforts.

A. E. HOUSMAN AND TRANSIENCE

I am a little puzzled by Mr. Brett's letter in which he accuses me of misinterpreting Housman by quoting the following lines in my article, "The Poet and Transience":

"Oh tarnish late on Wenlock Edge,
Gold that I never see;
Lie long, high snowdrifts in the hedge
That will not shower on me."

My article inferred that the poet was oppressed by a sense of transience in writing these lines. Mr. Brett ridicules this and says the lines are "simply" nostalgic. If one reads the second and third verses of the poem together, it seems very clear to me that the poet is expressing a deep wish that the gold of the broom flower and the white may blossom of the hedge were not as short lived as in fact they are. My emphasis was on the "tarnish *late*" and "lie *long*."

Moreover, nostalgia and the sense of transience are surely very near relations. It would perhaps not be inaccurate to describe nostalgia as a heart-sickness for things from which we are temporarily separated, whilst the sense of transience of which I wrote in my article is a heart-sickness for things that permanently cease to be.

Mr. Brett recommends me to read the book *A.E.H.* by Laurence Housman. I am very familiar with it, and it casts an interesting light on the nostalgia which Mr. Brett finds in the poem in question. The first line of this poem from "A Shropshire Lad" is, of course, " 'Tis time, I think, by Wenlock town." On page 255 of *A.E.H.* the author states that, in the first draft of the poem, "Wenlock town" appears as "Stourbridge town." Wenlock is, of course, in Shropshire, but Stourbridge is in Worcestershire. Laurence Housman concludes (also on page 255) that "greater beauty of sound may have decided the change into Shropshire."

On page 20 of the same book, A. E. Housman is quoted as having said "I was born in Worcestershire, not Shropshire, *where I have never spent much time*."

Mr. Brett suggests that A. E. Housman wrote the poem in question in a mood of nostalgia for the "county he loved so well." The above shows, however, that he had never spent much time in this county, that he originally wrote the poem as relating to quite another county, and that his brother thinks he may have changed the county for reasons of "greater beauty of sound." "Greater beauty of sound" is very far removed from the nostalgia which Mr. Brett supposes to have moved Housman to write of Shropshire.

Mr. Brett accuses me of lack of knowledge of *A Shropshire Lad* and the life of its author. I trust he will agree that this conclusion was a little hasty.

January 31, 1945. WILLIAM WOLFF.

A German reader reminds us that Klaus Mann, in his recently published autobiography, has a word on this subject, pointing out that Hugo von Hoffmannsthal, of whom Sir George Franckenstein spoke at a Poetry Society meeting last autumn, "is one of the few poets who have not only grasped but also formulated this tremendous feeling of transitoriness. Whenever I think of the chimerical change of all mortal stuff I recall Hoffmansthal's verse, 'Dies ist ein Ding,' etc. (This is a thing nobody quite conceives, and horrifying beyond lament: that everything fleets

and flits away)," adding "T. S. Eliot's vision, like Rilke's, seems to transcend at times the scope of our earth-bound perception. Both Eliot and Rilke are somehow initiated into that magic silence where 'the unspoken word, the Word unheard, the Word without a word' unfolds its ultimate unspeakable validity. . . . It strikes me as odd and depressing that most people consider Eliot's poems and those of Rilke's last and purest period cryptic and intricate. To my ear they have the bland persuasion of simple prayers and songs. Only cerebral abstractions or vulgarities can be incomprehensible. The truly poetic message may be dark, for so is Life, from the heart of which it emanates. To call this streaming shadowiness 'obscure' means to disparage or ignore the secrets and revelations inherent in 'this brief dream-crossed twilight between birth and dying.' "

PROPER RHYMES

I am moved to protest against the *obiter dictum* of your reviewer of "Poets and Pretenders," in the October-December issue, that "blue" and "dew" are *not* in rhyme. I have never been able to make sense of this highbrow fallacy. The vowel sound is plainly that of double O in any one of the following specimens: "too," "blew," "you," "d'you" or "dew"; at least I have never heard anyone teach any distinction in theory or make any in practice. How then can it be maintained that the words are not in rhyme, unless on the basis that proper rhyming demands indentical spelling? And nobody suggests that.

Previous experience of the fallacy seems to indicate that it is associated always with the interposition of the y sound; but this is surely quite irrelevant. It might as well be suggested that "witch" can rhyme with "itch," but "which" cannot.

Edinburgh, February 17, 1945. PATRICK R. LAIRD.

G. K. CHESTERTON'S "SILLINESS"

In his account of Chesterton in *The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature* Mr. George Sampson seems to have missed the Chestertonian point. His dislikes him because he is "freakish" and "sometimes elaborately silly," and although he does pay tribute where it cannot be withheld, he cannot say more for him than that he was a "journalist of genius." It is necessary that an answer be made to this Mr. Sampson, "that dared attack my Chesterton."

What, then, was the Chestertonian point? The clearest expression of it is to be found in his essay "A Defence of Nonsense":

> ". . . nonsense will, in a very unexpected way, come to the aid of the spiritual view of things. Religion has for centuries been trying to make men exult in the 'wonders' of creation, but it has forgotten that a thing cannot be completely wonderful so long as it remains sensible. So long as we regard a tree as an obvious thing, naturally and reasonably created for a giraffe to eat, we cannot properly wonder at all. It is when we consider it as a prodigious wave of the living soil sprawling up to the skies for no reason in particular that we take off our hats, to the astonishment of the park-keeper. . . . Nonsense and faith (strange as the conjunction may seem) are the two supreme symbolic assertions of the truth that to draw out the soul of things with a syllogism is as impossible as to draw out

Leviathan with a hook. The well-meaning person who, by merely studying the logical side of things, has decided that 'faith is nonsense,' does not know how truly he speaks; later, it may come back to him in the form that nonsense is faith."

Such was the interpretation of life that he had; and so nonsense, or freakishness, or elaborate silliness—call it what you will—was the medium through which he expressed and tried to inculcate it. For he was a mystic, as all who voluntarily embrace Catholicism must be; and thus he who wrote like a saint of sceptical common sense was able to accept all that ritual which to the non-Catholic is nonsense. There was no trace of schizophrenia in him.

He was consistent throughout, moving along a road that to him was all so very plain that his critics lose their way; and it was this consistency which made it possible for him to write "The Song against Grocers" at one moment and "The House of Christmas" at another. For the world of the wicked grocer is "wild as an old wives' tale, And strange the plain things are," and the lady whom he keeps in a cage lives in a universe which also includes "the things that cannot be and that are." It is Chesterton's universe, a Catholic universe; and one of the things that strikes Protestants as odd about Catholics is that they can go to Mass in the morning and a beer-garden in the afternoon. But that is their peculiar rationalisation of the wild world, and Chesterton was its best orator.

Everything that he wrote was an expression and a championing of this rationalisation, this religion. Father Brown is everywhere. Whatever his theme—a donkey, a crime, the oecumenical Church—he saw on this side and on that, in perspective and in proportion, and presented it to us so ingenuously that we believe him when we would not believe another who offered us precisely the same truth but dogmatically and hieratically. For Chesterton was an artist because he had decided upon a deliberate technique which came easy to him and in which he profoundly trusted, and he was a gay artist because he was a gay man, sure of himself, companionable, blessed with wit and eupepsia. Heaven for him was where God was, but it was no Alexandra Palace with golden floors. It was a comfortable inn where the triumvirate of the Deity, Hilaire Belloc and himself, all sharing the great secret, sat and toasted one another right royally and with deep mutual respect, three members of the intellectual presidium of "quite a widespread conspiracy."

Only the humourless go hunting around for signs of blasphemy where none can exist. Chesterton was a blockbuster of good humour. His brilliant tongue lay innocently in his cheek: it was comfortable there and he believed in comfort, being built that way. If only, he thought, other men would learn to take themselves and their religion a little less seriously. If only they would give themselves a rest from the sadness of their atheism and stand up and roar with laughter so that the cows stare at them and call a committee. Then they too would see the truth as clearly as it was staring them in the face. He would have to show them how it is done, these millions

"that do not have the faith,
And will not have the fun."

He did show them, in book after book, article after article, poem after poem, lecture after lecture—and they clamoured for seats.

For he showed them in a way that was their preference as well as his. Instead of the heavy-handed directives of the un-Brown-like Fathers he offered them a guidance

that was irradiated with levity and well watered with wine. "Blest are the light of heart, for they shall see our God" might have been his version of the hymn.

He taught as all successful teachers do, without browbeating, frowns and solemn incantations: about the child of Bethlehem, Mr. F. E. Smith, his favourite beverage, secret societies, local Napoleons, penny-dreadfuls, Charles Dickens (who was himself only when "he was describing something funny"), industrial cartels and monopoly-capitalists—and all in the fond hope that God would bless his readers and give them more sense.

We may hate him for his anti-Communist politics, for being an enemy of big business men, for being a Catholic, for his addiction to the bottle, for his streak of antisemitism, for being everyman's mentor. He was a man and we see his failings as well as his greatness. But the critic is seeking something more than to establish the nature of a man's beliefs and to side with or against him on their account: partisanship is no part of the critic's function. He seeks rather to discover the essential man as he is seen in his art and to determine the importance of that man and that art as an expression of him.

Chesterton was the kind of man whose own refusal—or inability—to be sanctimonious has made him safe against the Dons. He put nothing on a pedestal which the high priests can knock off, and the pedestal-hunters bruise only themselves against his expansive wisdom and bonhomie.

In every sense of the term he was a big man who knew his own strength and could afford not to be petty. The truly pure in heart can afford to be anti-Puritan, and those who have seen the Light and not been dazzled into blindness by it know better than to listen to those who talk "of progress spiring round": instead, they do as he did—"put on the big blue cap that always fits" and ask: "Will someone take me to a pub?"

Windsor, March 29th. W. G. BEBBINGTON.

[Mr. Bebbington is the compiler of the Faber anthology, *Introducing Modern Poetry*, who stoutly defended its purpose and scope against our criticism (in the course of which the price was given as 15s. instead of 6s., as stated in Messrs. Faber's advertisement in the same issue) in a notable letter published in a recent POETRY REVIEW.]

THE GREENWOOD PRIZE FOR 1945

The Poetry Society is empowered by the executors of the late Mrs. Julia Wickham Greenwood to offer the sum of £20 as the Shirley Carter Greenwood Prize for 1945 for the best single poem in open competition addressed "The Greenwood Premium, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," before July 1st; only one poem to be submitted by any one competitor, length not exceeding 250 lines; no previously-published poem may be entered; full name and address of author must be given on each poem and a stamped addressed envelope enclosed. (If a *nom-de-plume* is adopted, name and address of sender must be given in a closed envelope bearing the pseudonym.) The winning poem shall be printed in THE POETRY REVIEW and may be reprinted at the discretion of the Poetry Society and the adjudicator may reserve near winners for publication in THE POETRY REVIEW. This annual prize is assuming a high authority and significance, becoming the recognised highest annual award for a poem.

The Premium Editor's Report

IT is very encouraging to get, as has been my recent good fortune, so many appreciative tributes from my lecturees, who so far from resenting my pontifical pronouncements upon the best way to write immortal poetry, receive them with that charming humility which is by far the best guarantee of success in that arduous pursuit. There is no time, unfortunately, to reply separately to each expression of gratitude which reaches me; and so I take this public opportunity of being grateful in my turn, and not only grateful but gratified that so many people are finding my advice good. It would not have become me to have suggested that the improvement in the work of so many of our competitors was in any way connected with my efforts to guide them but they have done it for me; and if I say that their hearts are ruling their heads in this matter; and that the improvement is all theirs; it is not to invite a more vehement acknowledgment of a non-existent debt. But we may all be glad and take heart for future effort.

What I admire most about my Premium competitors is their willingness to compete in an open forum where the order of merit must be publicly announced; there are too many of those others whose vanity insists on publicity only in triumph and who for this reason refuse to submit themselves to a public trial. But by adversity are we made strong, and I take comfort in that reflection when I am compelled to inflict it upon my most constant adherents. To say that nothing succeeds like success is to invert the poetical order.

But to my task; this is a report not an exchange of compliments. This time there is no question of a walk-over, but to off-set this, there is a greater consistency of merit and a really refreshing diminution in those technical mistakes which I have so constantly deplored. If this goes on there will be no occasion for a report, a happy consequence, no doubt, but one which will deprive me of the encouraging expressions which you have offered me.

Some confusion has been caused by a diversity of opinion, seeming to have originated from one source, myself, about the place and value of thought in the making of poetry. It happened that on one occasion last year, that from which the contradiction might be said to have arisen, a deputy was responsible for this report, enemy action having interrupted my activity for a time. My own view, recently stated, is that one cannot construct a poem from thought. The mind must be "possessed" by an emotional upsurge from much profounder depths than those of the intellect and its apparatus directed not by itself but by this unconscious power liberated as an inspiration. Like may only speak to like, and only when we write from inspiration may we inspire; only when we speak from emotion may we speak to it. The most abiding and obstinate self-deception which afflicts the poet is that which leads him to hope that his "clever" poem will succeed, for it can only be heard in the mind and will therefore be only just one more poem to be read once and forgotten for ever. The presence of the tiniest ray of light from that unknown darkness of our unplumbed deeps will, on the contrary, redeem the simplest verse from insignificance.

The Premium on this occasion is awarded to Cynthia Palmer (York) for a fine Petrarchan sonnet, "Should I Return," supposed to be spoken by a prisoner of war in Japan:

"Should I return, will you go on ahead
And tell the waiting woods to weep that day?
Then I will walk their secret sodden way
With drenching moss like mercy where I tread.
And through the trees where mottled light is spread
Tell twilight to come slow! Let dawn be grey!
Here stands a fence twixt freedom and a bay
Where swings a sea too bright, a sun too red.
And when the ship that bears my soul puts out
For English harbour or for Paradise,
No more an out-law from the shadowed pool
Whose memory chills the fever and the drought,
I'll kneel and plunge my hands, and when I rise
I'll find them clean and cool. Ah! God, how cool."

There is no uncertain appeal to my emotion in this beautiful sonnet, and I know it came from an emotional perception born not in the mind, in fact not born at all, for it sprang from the immortal.

The runners-up, this time two only in the highly commended class, are given, alphabetically as follows:

HIGHLY COMMENDED

W. H. Bartlett, Tiverton;
Catherine Blakiston, Milford.

COMMENDED

Phyllis N. Bower, London, S.E.10;
Major T. Bouch, Ashorne;
Erica May Brooks, New York;
W. H. Dennett-Morgan, Redhill;
R. G. Duff, Teignmouth;
C. W. Harrison, Budleigh Salterton;
Elizabeth S. Nutt, Nova Scotia;
Col. L. T. Shorthose, D.S.O.;
Pte. Margery Smith, Kendal;
Norma E. Smith, Nova Scotia;
W. V. Wall, Liverpool;
F. M. Wilkie, Ulverston;
J. E. Winbolt, London, S.E.19.

The usual premium offer for the best poem or poems submitted to the Premium Editor during the month (without limitation of subject) is continued. Not more than four lyrics or one long poem should be submitted. MSS. should reach "The Premium Editor, THE POETRY REVIEW, 33 Portman Square, London, W.1," by June 1st, accompanied by stamped addressed envelope, and if criticism is desired, 5s. should be sent. It is essential that entrants to this competition be members of The Poetry Society or registered subscribers to THE POETRY REVIEW, and that each poem bears the name and address of the author. (Entries received after the formal closing date are carried forward to the next adjudication.)

A perverse printer turned "Lay" into "Lady" in our notice on p. 55 of Mrs. E. M. Stephenson's penetrating treatise, *T. S. Eliot and the Lay Reader.*